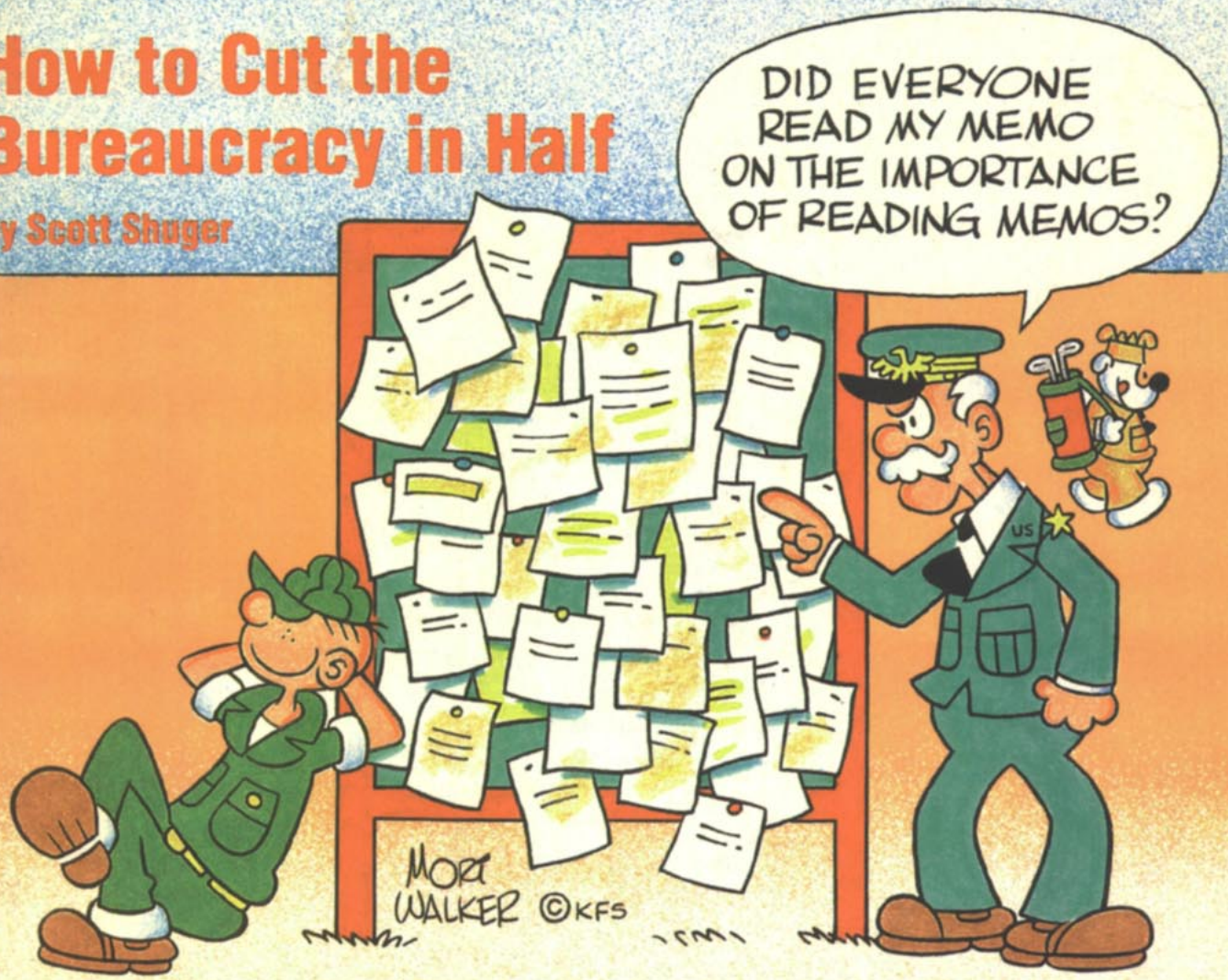
- Charles Peters on the beleaguered rich
- Why the U.S. still can't fight the war on terrorism
- Art Levine as Robert Caro

The Washington Monthly

JUNE 1990/$3.00

How to Cut the Bureaucracy in Half

by Scott Shuger



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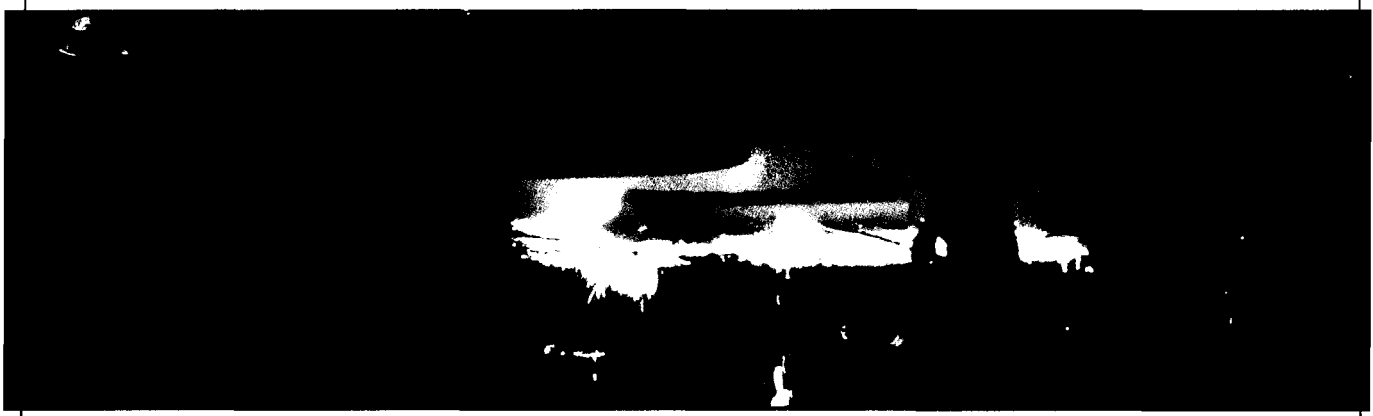
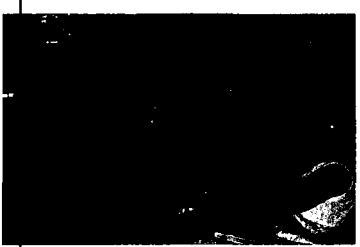


Individual policyholders and their families are not the only beneficiaries of life insurance.



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The Washington Monthly

Volume Twenty-Two, Number Five June 1990

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LETTERS

Grant me this

I read with interest David Hamilton's article on scientific misconduct ["White Coats, Black Deeds," April]. However, Mr. Hamilton has incorrect information about the NIH's support for research grants.

1) $7 billion refers to the entire NIH budget for fiscal year 1989, including extramural research grants, training support, as well as intramural and other expenditures. The portfolio of extramural research grants costs slightly more than $5 billion.

2) NIH supported a total of 25,148 extramural research grants last year, of which 5,382 were new and competing research project grants. The balance of the extramural research-grant portfolio included continuation (noncompeting) grants, center grants, and other research grants.

Since these 25,148 extramural research grants cost $5 billion, this yields an average of nearly $200,000 per grant, not the $1.3 million per grant he quotes.

ALICIA K. DUSTIRA
Washington, D.C.

Gut response

A colleague recently brought to my attention an article in your magazine by Jason DeParle and Liza Mundy entitled "Why Higher Education is Neither" [October 1989]. While I appreciate the concern of the authors about the state of the undergraduate curriculum in American higher education, I would have had greater respect for the integrity of their perspective had they done their homework about my own university, UCLA.

Early in their essay, when they are seeking to build up evidence to support their contention that "distribution requirements are in fact no more than a smoke-and-mirrors curricular trick," they criticize most universities for two forms of laxity: gut courses and narrowness of scope. To illustrate the former, they assert that "students at UCLA last year could meet half of their science requirements with 'Geology 150: The History of Los Angeles,' once voted one of the country's 10 easiest courses." First, no such course exists at UCLA, and although a very fine upper-division course is offered in the Department of History on that topic, it does not satisfy any General Education requirement. Second, and no less important, this statement does great disservice to UCLA's recent and continuing attempts to address precisely the kinds of issues that the authors would have us believe are central to their thesis.

One of my responsibilities in the College of Letters and Science is the General Education curriculum, which was completely revised in 1987 by the faculty after a long and careful examination. Nearly one-third of the graduation requirements in the College are devoted to General Education, which includes four courses in the Humanities, four in the Social Sciences (including both Social and Historical Analysis), three in the Life Sciences, and three in the Physical Sciences. While there is no core curriculum at UCLA, the General Education curriculum consists of a meaningful set of distribution requirements, which "are intended to introduce undergraduates to the richness and diversity of the various academic disciplines" and "are designed to broaden your intellectual perspective and to set you on the path to becoming an educated member of society" (*UCLA General Catalog 1989-90*, p. 80).

These may be fighting words to the authors, but most of my colleagues take them very seriously and work hard to translate those ideas into classroom reality for the students. There are also published criteria for General Education courses, and the faculty strive to avoid additional course proliferation and overspecialization in approving any additions to the new list of approved General Education courses.

Thus, although Mr. DeParle and Ms. Mundy are seeking to make a legitimate point about the quality of undergraduate education, scattergun approaches such as the one with which they begin their article do not serve their cause well.

EDWARD A. ALPERS
Dean of Honors and Undergraduate Programs, UCLA
Los Angeles, California

The authors reply:

Due to a transposition error, we wrongly scolded UCLA for "The History of Los Angeles"; the course to which we intended to refer, and to which the article's assessment applies, is "Atmospheric Sciences 4: California Weather and Climate." The recent graduates who alerted us to the course began their academic careers prior to the 1987 General Education revision noted by Dean Alpers and were thus governed by a somewhat less strenuous set of science requirements. But even under the current, post-revision regulations, UCLA undergraduates still can opt to study West Coast meteorology as a substitute for chemistry, math, or physics.

Stock response

Charles Peters repeatedly lumps "affluent individuals" with "affluent corporations" whenever he calls for soak-the-rich taxes ["Tilting at Windmills," March]. His underlying assumption appears to be that corporations are owned primarily by rich people. This notion, were it true, would have an undeniable appeal to Mr. Peters as it would result in a double whammy on rich folks. The problem is that publicly traded corporations are in reality owned by a variety of citizens, among them: workers through their pension plans, small savers through their mutual funds, and young families through their insurance policies. Taxing rich peo-

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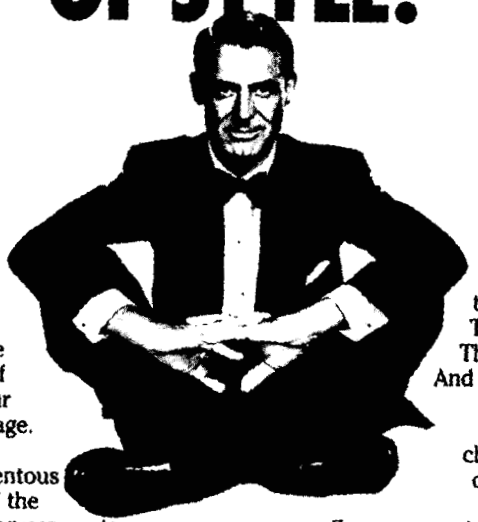

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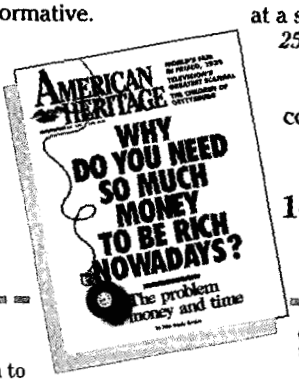

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ple at higher rates is an arguably legitimate policy, but doing it by taxing "affluent corporations" inadvertently places some of the burden on the people who are supposed to benefit from progressive tax policies.

JONATHAN FOTOS
Arlington, Virginia

On liberty

Many thanks for the courage and honesty of your investigation into the homeless ["Who are the Homeless?" Scott Shuger, March]. You say some things that have long needed saying, and your concern for the homeless is obviously not diminished by your candor.

One element of your "X-factor" applies to the mentally ill and substance-addicted homeless as well: Just because you're down and out doesn't mean you don't love your independence and your freedom to come and go. The form it takes is often self-destructive and socially obnoxious, but many of the homeless may feel there's a certain dignity to it as well. For them the housing solutions proposed by some advocates for the homeless are apt to be taken as threats of incarceration.

HAL RIEDL
Baltimore, Maryland

Weenie-roast

I would like to compliment *The Washington Monthly* for the article "Renting the Fourth Estate" by Michael Willrich and the supporting article "Journalists, Inc." by James S. Doyle in your March issue.

Mr. Willrich has certainly made me look at and think more carefully about the top journalists whose very visibility seems to give them credibility. Thank you for this timely article, which raises real issues about how public policy is perceived and made.

ELIZABETH CROSSMAN
New York, New York

As a reporter working far, far, from the confines of the Beltway, I may well be categorized as one of Robert Novak's "little weenies," jealous of the niceties one can buy with honoraria income.

But I'm not jealous. I'm disgusted. Novak and his speech/appearance-making buddies insult not only the "little weenies" who believe in their calling but the reading and listening public as well.

Who are these people to take their public so lightly? Ethics start from within, Mr. Novak. You must be hollow.

JILL BETH LANG
Waldoboro, Maine

Correction

An item in "Tilting at Windmills" in our March issue about Panamanian banks and money laundering referred incorrectly to the relationship of the Dadeland Bank of Florida to a senior Panamanian official and accusations of money laundering. Guillermo (Billy) Ford, second vice-president of Panama, is not an owner of Dadeland. No federal or state authorities have accused Dadeland of improper ties to the Medellin drug cartel.

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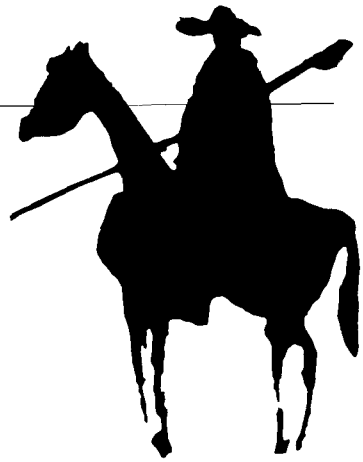
TILTING AT WINDMILLS



Now that the Cold War appears to be winding down, a lot of fellows around town are scratching their heads wondering what they're going to do next. This includes neoconservative columnists, who are trying to think of something else to write about besides The Red Menace, and the entire defense establishment, including the famous Beltway Bandits of the consulting industry. And, of course, the intelligence agencies.

The fruit of this frantic brainstorming at one agency was evident in a headline that appeared in the April 30 *Washington Times*:

> CIA Task Force To Monitor Business Activities Abroad. . . .

I have in my hands a press release from the office of Rep. Toby Moffett that points with pride to an article in a Meriden, Connecticut *Record Journal* headlined, "Moffett Leads in 5th District Fund Raising." Why, you may wonder, would a congressman think it politically wise to brag that he has the most money? The reason—and this helps explain why incumbents are so obsessed with fundraising—is that this kind of headline intimidates. It either frightens away potential opponents or discourages their potential supporters. . . .

As one who prays daily that some wise statesman may yet throw a monkey wrench into the machinery of German reunification, I am obviously not coolly rational about the prospects for a Fourth Reich. But even those who profess to be unworried about reunification may find cause for concern in research recently reported in *The New York Times*. It compared the playground behavior of Danish, Italian, and German children, and the adults who were watching over them.

Danish and Italian adults committed no acts of aggression, not even spanking, against their children. This compared to 73 aggressive acts committed by the German adults against their children.

The Danish children committed 20 aggressive acts, such as throwing rocks, against other children; Italian children, 48. The figure for the German children was 258. . . .

One of the problems with police departments is that promotion often has little to do with previous performance. I'm indebted to Donald Graham, the publisher of *The Washington Post*, one of the few journalists to actually have had experience as a cop, for reminding me in a recent article he wrote:

"Amazingly, the department still has a promotion system in which effectiveness at a patrolman's job has nothing to do with promotion. Who makes sergeant is based partly on an exam and partly on a brief interview with two police officials and a citizen, who are supposed to be unacquainted with the officer they're interviewing.". . .

This reminds me of another important point. Donald Graham must know that because of his experience, he understands a lot about police work that his reporters don't. Why not expand that lesson and require that new *Post* reporters be hired at least partly on the basis of having real experience in government and the other areas they cover? I have found that nothing has meant more to me as a journalist covering government than my experience in the federal bureaucracy and before that as a state legislator, lawyer, and soldier. Knowing what it's really like on the inside gives one a sense of where the bodies are buried and what are the right questions to ask. . . .

Speaking of experience, my guess is that this will be the year in which the nation as a whole becomes aware of its value in still another job, the presidency. Because 1990 is the centennial of Eisenhower's birth, there are sure to be some new books—one already scheduled for publication in October is a biography by Stephen Ambrose—and probably scores of articles about Ike's life and his years in the White House.

I'm confident that one conclusion of these new appraisals will be that Eisenhower was without rival among his fellow

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presidents in his ability to oversee the Pentagon. He would instantly recognize padding in the military budget because he had been, if not an actual padder himself, a friend and confidante who would hear over lunch or dinner in the officers' mess exactly how the figures were inflated.

Experiences at the top, such as George Bush had in the Nixon-Ford-Reagan years, are useful, but there are things a subordinate knows that the bosses will never understand unless they have been one.

You realize how much we need Eisenhower now when we read news stories such as this by Richard Scarborough of *The Washington Times*:

"The Navy is moving full speed with plans to maintain its 14 aircraft carriers."

Why? What's the threat they would guard against? It's the Syrians. That's right, the Syrians.

Vice Admiral Richard Dunleavy, assistant chief of naval operations, recently told a Senate Armed Forces subcommittee: "Right now I'd be more worried about going against the Syrians than the Soviets.". . .

"As part of their efforts to increase exports, encourage foreign investment, and promote tourism," reads a recent press release from the National Governors' Association, "last year governors from 41 states and territories made 82 trips to 35 countries." Now, don't you have the tiniest suspicion that the governors' own tourism also had something to do with those trips?. . .

Back to journalists and life experience again. If you are a reporter who didn't spend a couple of years in the bureaucracy before joining your paper, don't despair. There are still two things you can do.

One is take a leave of absence to work in government. The other is to refuse to become permanently mired in superficial coverage of the day's events. Seek assignments that permit you to investigate subjects thoroughly. Instead of spending your days chasing ambulances, ask your editor to give you six weeks to find out why the ambulance service doesn't work. Make your inquiry sufficiently thorough so that, instead of ending up with "he said"-"she said" quotes from the experts, you'll know and be able to tell your readers which of the experts is right.

Reporting done in this kind of depth will enrich your intellectual capital in a way that daily journalism never will. . . .

If you have wondered what the legislative officials called sergeants-at-arms actually do, be grateful to Teresa Simons of UPI, who reports that those of the California Assembly have "driven legislators or their children to ballgames, movies, and rock concerts. They have carried out legislators' household garbage, moved furniture into lawmakers' homes, picked up prescriptions, fetched a forgotten umbrella or coat, and even purchased underwear.

"Assemblyman Richard Polanco (D-Los Angeles), who works out daily at the Capital Athletic Club four blocks from the Capitol, is almost always driven there. He once was driven to a restaurant a block from the Capitol.

"Assemblyman Elihu M. Harris (D-Oakland) once sent a sergeant to his home to turn off a Crock-Pot and put it in the refrigerator.

"Rather than drive himself to his Santa Clara home on weekends, Democratic Assemblyman John Vasconcellos has a sergeant drive him in his convertible so he can rest or read. Another sergeant follows in a second car to take the first driver back.

"Assemblywoman Sunny Mojonnier (R-Encinitas) once asked a sergeant to take a blanket and snacks to her teenage son in Nevada City. She has him picked up from his Sacramento high school as often as two or three times a week.

"Sen. Alan Robbins (D-Tarzana) has had cat food delivered to his home and office. Robbins once asked that his cat be brought to the Capitol, sergeants said, but that request was refused."

We can be grateful there are still men of principle among us. . . .

The regents of Oklahoma's higher education system are proposing that students must have a C average to participate in sports. The reason such a rule is needed is suggested by the disclosure that in the most recent academic term, five of the 13 members of the Oklahoma basketball team had D averages or worse and that nearly half of the football lettermen had below C averages. . . .

A glimpse into the true nature of the legal profession's altruism is provided by the managing partner of a prominent firm in a new book published by the American Bar Association called *Managing Partners 101: A Primer on Firm Leadership*:

"As leader of a board or organization, you have the opportunity to strut your stuff, showing clients, potential clients, and community leaders what you can do."

Don't waste your time on small

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charities, however worthy, since, as the author notes, "positions with large, well-known institutions often require no more work than small, unknown ones.". . .

Speaking of lawyers, the current issue of the *Harvard Law Review* deserves high praise for running Kenneth Lasson's attack on law review articles, "Scholarship Amok: Excesses in the Pursuit of Truth and Tenure." It describes legal writing as "bleak and turgid" with "long sentences, awkward syntax, and overweening commitment to noncommittal buzzwords."

My favorite of the noncommittal buzzwords has always been "appropriate," which is also, by the way, enormously popular among bureaucrats, many of whom manage to include it in every paragraph they write. Having outlined a problem, they boldly recommend that an "appropriate" response be made. Think a little while about what that actually means and you'll see why the word is so beloved throughout the bureaucracy and the legal profession. . . .

It can be argued that we should not reward the Iranians for releasing hostages. But does anyone think we should slap them in the face? Apparently the United States Navy does. On the same day Robert Polhill was released, this headline appeared in *The Washington Post*:

2 *Vincennes* Officers Get Medals

The Navy, the accompanying story explained, was awarding the Legion of Merit to Captain Will Rogers, the ship's captain, and Lt. Commander Scott Lustig, its weapons and combat systems officer, the two men who were most obviously culpable in the trigger-happy shooting down of that Iranian airliner in the Persian Gulf in which 290 lives were lost. As Scott Shuger mentions in his article "How to Cut the Bureaucracy in Half," starting on p. 38, such awards are a telltale sign of an organization that's confused about what it's supposed to be doing. . . .

This is my month to be traumatized by headlines. Another that I found hard to believe was:

GM Seeks Sharp Increase In Top Executive's Pensions

Of course, the top levels of the auto industry are already disgracefully overpaid. GM should be putting every penny it has to spare into the development of products that are good enough to clobber the competition from abroad. . . .

Still another am-I-losing-my-mind-or-has-the-world-gone-crazy headline, this time from *The Washington Post:*

DOE Says Decade Is Needed To Weigh More A-Test Curbs

Yes, you got it right. The Department of Energy is saying it will take 10 years for it to decide whether the United States can agree to new restrictions on nuclear testing. In other words, the answer to the question on the cover of our April issue, "Will the Department of Energy Stop Nuking America?" is no, at least not until the year 2000. . . .

Those who put their faith in the experts should ponder this tale: The day before the Kentucky Derby, *USA Today* published a list of the horses selected to win by 23 of the leading racing writers of America. I decided to clip the predictions and review them after the race. Only one of the experts, David Austin of the Baltimore *Sun*, picked the winner. . . .

I am proud of the fact that this magazine was the first to candidly cover the culture of the legal profession. And I applaud Steven Brill, who, by launching *The American Lawyer,* made such coverage the subject of an entire magazine and inspired a raft of similar publications, some of them quite good. But the current champion at skewering the bar has to be David Margolick of *The New York Times*. An example of the kind of things he digs up is a recent article by Lisa Lerman in the University of Pennsylvania *Law Review* that tells how lawyers, when promised anonymity, will reveal that bill-padding, expertise-puffing, posterior-covering, and lying to clients are all common in the practice of law in modern America.

Here is an especially illuminating quote that Professor Lerman was able to elicit from one of the lawyers: "The worst clients from the point of view of the lawyer are the ex-partners who know damn well that lawyers do want to run up the meter."

What especially delights me about articles such as this and the one I cited earlier from the *Harvard Law Review*, is that they show how the students who edit the law journals are waking up to the truth about the profession they plan to enter. I hope that, except for the handful who truly love the law and have the ability and honor to serve its finest traditions, they decide to get out now, before it's too late.

By "too late" I refer to the time that will soon come in their professional lives when they begin to justify the tax-deductibility of a "Midyear Legal Seminar" held in Monte Carlo, which is exactly what the members of the Virginia Bar Association are doing this year. . . .

—*Charles Peters*

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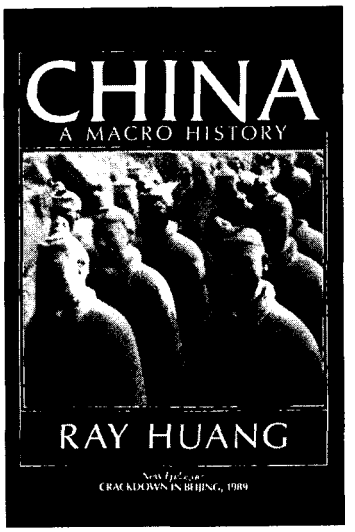

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Besieged and Beleaguered on $200,000 a Year

The rich feel too poor to pay more taxes. They're wrong, and liberals should let them know why.

by Charles Peters

Hardly a day goes by without a newspaper or magazine article proclaiming that the liberals or the Democrats are in disarray—leaderless, programless, and afraid to take a stand on anything. But I am convinced that there is a way out of the mess. It is a path that goes through some surprising areas usually thought to have little to do with politics and public policy.

The first step is overcoming the fear of taking a stand. It comes from another fear—the one that says avoid ideas that might be unpopular because they might lose elections. But if we advocate what is popular, we are sure to be wrong. The country itself is wrong, still mired in materialism and selfishness. The Me Decade is now in its 21st year. The ostentatious greed of Donald Trump may be on the way out, but there is little sign that social responsibility is on the way in.

The most successful films, even the most charming ones, such as "Big" and "Rainman," are about personal authenticity and relationships among lovers, friends, and family. Few are about our duty to a larger community. Few have characters like George Bailey in "It's a Wonderful Life" or Atticus Finch in "To Kill a Mockingbird."

Sixty percent of our youth say they would be unwilling to volunteer for a year in an organization like the Peace Corps or VISTA. Only 12 percent think good citizenship requires any kind of political activity, even voting. James Fallows reported in a recent issue of *The New York Review* that this spring 36,000 graduating students applied for jobs at just one mergers and acquisitions house.

Charles Peters is the editor-in-chief of The Washington Monthly.

These people don't need a leader who agrees with them. They need a leader who says they are wrong and shows them a better way.

A crucial way the country has gone wrong is that the natural aversion to taxes, especially to those on income, has become an obsession. The result is that even though the top tax rate was 38 percent just three years ago, the highest increase being considered today is from 28 to 33 percent, and even that modest proposal seems unlikely to be adopted by the president and the Congress.

Democrats are abandoning the great liberal goal of transferring enough wealth from the rich to the poor to give everyone a fair chance in life. *The New Republic*'s Mickey Kaus says: "Redistribution. Forget it." *The New York Times* describes the founders of a new liberal magazine as believing that a major reason for the decline of liberalism is "an overemphasis on the concept of redistribution of wealth." And E. J. Dionne Jr. of *The Washington Post* says, "The half-century old concept that government has a responsibility to narrow the gap between rich and poor no longer guides the design of American economic policy."

Dionne goes on to point out that, even when Daniel Patrick Moynihan proposes reducing the Social Security burden on workers, he does not advocate taxing the rich at a higher rate instead.

I do. It is here that I think the battle line must be drawn. Instead of continuing to surrender to the greedy, we must lead a resurgence of the generous spirit that has been at the heart of the great liberal tradition.

Consider, for a moment, the cruel impact of the

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social security tax on those who deserve our help most—the working poor—and ask yourself how it fits that tradition.

Suppose the young black ghetto male who fathers two children by a teenage girl does not desert her and take up a career as a dope peddler, leaving the girl and the children on welfare, as many of us fear he will. Suppose instead he marries her and takes a job flipping burgers at McDonald's and manages to make about $8,000 a year. Instead of giving him the medal he deserves, what do we do? We take $612 from his pay in social security taxes.

Instead of continuing to surrender to the greedy, we must lead a resurgence of the generous spirit that has been at the heart of the great liberal tradition.

There is a simple answer to this problem. Have taxes paid *only* by people who can afford to pay them. Don't crush those who can't afford to pay.

The good news is that there are plenty who *can* afford to pay and pay a lot more than they're paying now. There are almost three times as many millionaires today as there were just ten years ago.

If the rich can afford to pay, the next question is: Will they pay?

Many conservatives and even liberals like Kaus argue that the wealthy never paid the high rates that prevailed from the 1940s through the 1970s. The lore is that they all hired clever attorneys and accountants who either exploited existing loopholes or persuaded Congress to create new ones to help their clients avoid taxation. Some of this sort of thing did happen, but during almost the entire period *most* of the affluent did pay much higher rates than they do today. This was overwhelmingly the case with those whose income came from salaries. The shelter business did not become a major industry—and a major factor in tax avoidance—until the latter half of the seventies.

But even if the rich have paid higher rates in the past, will they pay them now, or is the motivation not to pay stronger today than it used to be?

The answer is yes. Two major changes have occurred that make the affluent more resistant to taxation. And if we don't understand them, a proposal to raise taxes will be political suicide.

One is growing skepticism about government, about the ability of public bureaucracies to spend tax dollars wisely. Consider the public schools.

A recent headline in *The New York Times* read:

"New Jersey Voters in Revolt Against Soaring School Taxes"

That more than stinginess is involved in this rebellion is suggested by an article that appeared in last month's *Money* magazine. It compares the schools of Delran, New Jersey, with those of Geneva, Illinois. The latter spends less money but produces clearly better educational results.

It doesn't take much common sense to realize that spending more money on across-the-board increases of teachers' salaries is going to encourage the bad teachers to stay. What we need are salary increases that reward only the good teachers.

Perhaps the most persuasive argument against thinking that money will solve the problem of the public schools comes from scrutinizing their administrative staffs. Although parochial schools in Chicago need only 32 administrators to oversee 200,000 students, the Chicago public schools require 3,000, about a hundred times more, to administer 400,000, or just twice as many, students. And if that shocks you, ponder the District of Columbia schools, which have 80,000 students, or one-fifth as many as Chicago, yet employ 400 more administrators. And the 3,400 D.C. administrators count only those that are *not* directly involved in school support activity!

This means that much of the money needed to reward and attract good teachers can be found by slashing administrative budgets. In the District of Columbia, for example, 36 cents of every school dollar goes to the bureaucrats.

Note, however, that I said "much of the money." Some is going to have to come from higher taxes. Head Start teachers are making only $12,000, which is way too low to attract good people. And we are far short of funding Head Start for all the children who need it. This is an undeniably good program, not a bureaucratic boondoggle. We should spend *more* money on it.

The point is that while we can and should save many billions of dollars by the surgical removal of fat at all levels of government, we also must face the fact that more money is going to have to be spent to give the nation the roads and schools and health care it wants, not to mention cleaning up the environment and funding a new Marshall Plan to help the emerging democracies get on their feet.

There is another and much more powerful factor than the declining faith in government in the increas-

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ing resistance to taxes. People today want lower taxes because they feel they need more money. Why do they feel that way? Why do the rich want to be so rich? Why did money get to mean so much in our society? How did nice guys come, in the seventies and eighties, to behave in increasingly selfish and greedy ways? The story begins with two developments of the period following World War II:

First was the education that the GI Bill made available to an entire generation of young men. The fact that higher education was readily available to all devalued the college degree. It was no longer an automatic ticket to the upper middle class.

Second, many of the veterans moved to the suburbs, partly to get better housing and partly because they no longer wanted to be identified with their old neighborhoods. This was only the first of many physical changes of place that eroded the sense of belonging to a community. The most powerful of these was that in the postwar era corporate America routinely transferred its employees from one location to another every few years. This meant as you moved from place to place you had to quickly establish your identity. Just having a college degree was no longer enough. It became important to have other distinctions—having a degree from an Ivy League institution or a graduate degree—or, and this was to be the key to most of the subsequent problems—by demonstrating taste.

If you wore the right clothes, read the right books and knew who was in and out in the world of art and literatures—the ins included Picasso, Kafka, Henry James, and *The Partisan Review,* the clearest out was Victorian architecture—you were accepted in the club. I have long suspected that the major reason for "My Fair Lady"'s popularity was its message that you can learn how to move up in class: acquire the right accent, wear the right clothes, know the latest small talk and you will be accepted.

While taste could be acquired through a thorough knowledge of art and literature, that involved a lot of work. It was easier to demonstrate taste by buying the right things, from the right tonic water to the right shirt—and to rely on someone knowledgeable to tell you what to buy.*

The Henry Higgins of America's emerging elite was *The New Yorker*. Its ads told you that the right tonic water was Schweppes and the right shirt was Hathaway. Its critics told you what to admire in the theater, art, music, dance, and literature. During the fifties, as advertisers realized *The New Yorker*'s power, it swelled with ads that told people what to buy and with columns that told them what to like in the arts. Its cartoons and "The Talk of the Town" even supplied them with the right small talk. Anyone who lived through the fifties must recall acquaintances whose entire conversational repertoire could be predicted from the contents of *The New Yorker*'s recent issues.

Then came the Kennedys. Upwardly mobile themselves, they instinctively knew how to exploit similar aspirations among the voters. Their influence, although in many other respects admirable, had the unfortunate effect of producing explosive growth in the taste-class industry. The women who adopted Jacqueline Kennedy's hair style began to want her designer clothes as well.

The demand for guidance in what to buy quickly became more than *The New Yorker* could satisfy. City magazines like *New York* and *The Washingtonian* sprang up across the country, each dedicated to furnishing even more explicit guidance than *The New Yorker* provided on such matters as the right wines or the right places to eat.

In the seventies and eighties, these magazines were joined by dozens of other publications, like *Spy* and the revived *Vanity Fair,* and by greatly expanded lifestyle sections in newspapers, all designed to help the upwardly mobile ascend the ladder.

At first, this trend was relatively harmless. Back in the forties and fifties, keeping up with *The New Yorker* didn't have to involve spending a lot of money. I remember buying a cotton suit in 1946 at Brooks Brothers for $20. In the 1950s, just a couple of dollars more would pay for the correct cotton raincoat at Abercrombie's. A frugal two months in Europe was possible for less than a thousand dollars—and Europe ranked second only to *The New Yorker* as the Henry Higgins of the era. Balcony seats for the ballet, the opera, and the theater could be had for a couple of dollars. And the tonic water *The New Yorker* told you was the right one—Schweppes—cost just pennies more than the other brands.

Great taste, less fulfilling

Then as people began to compete in the expression of good taste, money began to matter. Knowing the difference between red and white wine, which made you sophisticated in the fifties, was no longer enough. Now you had to learn to distinguish a Burgundy from a Bordeaux, then vintages, then vineyards. By this time you were into a bottle that cost 10 or 20 times what you were paying in the fifties. The same happened as the MG, the "in" foreign car of the

*The writer Vance Packard actually saw what was happening in the fifties and wrote a book, *The Status Seekers*, designed to stop it. But serious critics condescendingly dismissed the book, and other readers seemed to use it as a guide to do what was in and avoid what was out.

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fifties, which could be bought for $2,500 or so, became a Maserati in the eighties. At the same time, Jackie's designer labels were escalating the cost of clothing—and a host of other items. The monthly credit card statements were beginning to get depressing.

It was as people struggled to pay their bills for the fancy cars and the vacation homes at Aspen and in the Hamptons, that we began to see the sense of beleaguered ness, of being alone with one's back against the wall, that is so characteristic of the present time.

This is what led to the explosion of rules-bending that occurred in the eighties, not just on Wall Street but also in savings and loans all over America. When I was a member of the West Virginia legislature in 1960, I thought the place was crooked because about 10 percent of the legislators could be bought for cash. In the eighties the state's entire legislative leadership was convicted of corruption. In the federal government, where corruption had not been a major problem, we saw major scandals at HUD and at the Pentagon. Even the spies, such as the members of the Walker family, instead of being dedicated communists, had their hands out for cash.

People justified this kind of corruption because they were desperate to get more money. And here again another important factor was that loss of sense of community.* If you don't feel part of a community, you're not obligated to others. You don't worry about cheating people you don't know. If, for example, you evade taxes that would go to pay for the education of poor children, it doesn't bother you because your and your friends' children go to private school.

So not being part of a community led to the need to establish one's identity by proving taste, which led to the need for more and more money, which led to corruption, which was justified because you weren't part of the community.

What can we do to interrupt this mindless cycle?

Of course, the best solution is to put an end to snobbery. But we're not going to do that soon. I recommend Cheap Chic as a quick way to get us started back to the right path.

*In addition to the loss of community, another reason for the demoralization of American public life was the loss of optimism and hope that followed in the wake of Watergate, Vietnam, and the assasinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and John and Robert Kennedy.

What we need now is a *Spy* magazine totally devoted to ridiculing the idea that money proves taste and that taste proves class, or that class is even important.

To start with, tastemakers like Tina Brown should glorify a sneaker so inexpensive that practically everyone can afford it. This would have the additional benefit of eliminating ghetto homicides over a pair of Nikes.

The most perfect example of Cheap Chic I have known is the book *Europe on $5 a Day*, which was immensely popular in the fifties and sixties. It made a great game out of figuring out how to do the grand tour at absurdly low prices.

The people who need Cheap Chic the most are the couples making $100,000 to $250,000. Many of the most influential couples in the media and the government fall in this group. They have the power to prevent a tax increase, and they are the ones who feel most beleaguered by the cost of the BMW and the Volvo, the Georgetown house and the condo at Vail, and the two kids at Harvard. Many really do have a hard time affording all that.

Instead of that BMW and Volvo, they should consider a Taurus and an Escort.* Instead of having a vacation home, why not just take a vacation like regular people used to do? Instead of sending the kids to Harvard, why not send them to a good state university like California or Michigan? Or do the parents have so little faith in the kids' ability that they think they must pay a premium price to give them a leg-up among the elite? And instead of sending them to Exeter or St. Paul's, why not work to reform their local public schools where the tuition is zero?

What we most need now is a *Spy* magazine that frees itself from trying to be part of an exclusive club and instead is totally devoted to ridiculing the idea that money proves taste and that taste proves class, or that class is even important.

Then we can go to work eliminating all the other things that divide us, from the adversarial legal system, which is becoming more and more poisonous and wasteful of talent as more and more of our brightest people seek their fortunes in the practice of law, to the racial hostility that is increasingly fueled by class antagonisms, to the political action committees, which are the embodiment of the politics of selfishness. But make no mistake, excessive regard for money is Public Enemy Number One. □

*Other good cars in a price range down around the Escort's are the Plymouth Acclaim, the Mitsubishi Mirage, the Honda Civic, and the Geo Prizm.

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MUDDYING THE WATERS

THE YEARS OF MARTIN LUTHER KING by ROBERT A. CARO*

*As told to Art Levine

The latest installment of Robert Caro's biography of Lyndon Johnson was either praised or damned by reviewers this spring. Both sides had their points: Caro's work, like his first book about Johnson and his outstanding biography of Robert Moses, is for the most part brilliant, but his distaste for Johnson led him to exaggerate LBJ's flaws and downplay his virtues, while sanctifying LBJ's old political rival Coke Stevenson, who was, to put it gently, less than fully deserving of the honor. All of this got us to wondering how even such a clearly heroic figure as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. might fare under Caro's approach. Fortunately, we didn't have to wonder long, because, thanks to a postal mix-up, we received the following manuscript in the mail.

—The Editors

Introduction:

Martin Luther King Jr.'s life was essentially about a drive for power and glory, power not just to achieve justice, but power for its own sake: naked, ruthless power that would crush anything that stood in its way, and a hunger for glory so profound that he would jeopardize the health and safety of his family and colleagues. Cunning as he was, he was able—through the help of his aides and cronies—to construct a legend about himself, a myth about his nobility and selflessness. It is a myth that has been perpetuated by other biographers, and it is a myth that, under the weight of the evidence I've gathered, collapses.

Finally, after spending 15 years interviewing 12,893 people who knew King or lived through his times, I am able to rip off the veil of secrecy that surrounds him and tell the real truth about his life. He had a dark side and a bright side, yet, sadly, in the conflict that makes up a central part of this work, the spring, 1963 desegregation campaign in Birmingham, we see the traits that not only helped fuel his drive for worldwide fame, but also hurt innocent people: deceit, megalomania, promiscuity, cynical pragmatism.

The Birmingham campaign is also important because it tells us about the transformation of the politics of protest in America. Martin Luther King brought a slick, sophisticated new politics to a sleepy southern town unable to compete with his Machiavellian wiles. King's new politics, fueled by enormous sums of hidden cash, used the mass media to create instant martyrs out of Birmingham's protesters. It also created a "devil figure" in the person of Eugene "Bull" Connor, the commissioner of public safety whose career has been distorted and misunderstood by untold numbers of journalists. King faced, in the idealistic, earnest simplicity of Bull Connor, someone ill-equipped to do battle in the new media age, a beloved, folksy populist who harkened back to a quieter, more graceful, and, in some ways, more honest era. The true story of Bull Connor has been all but lost to history, and I intend to correct that oversight.

Birmingham or bust

It was Martin Luther King's last chance. If he lost the upcoming campaign to end segregation in placid but booming Birmingham, his position as the most prominent Negro civil rights leader would be eroded, perhaps destroyed—and so would his chance to be-

Art Levine is a contributing editor of The Washington Monthly.

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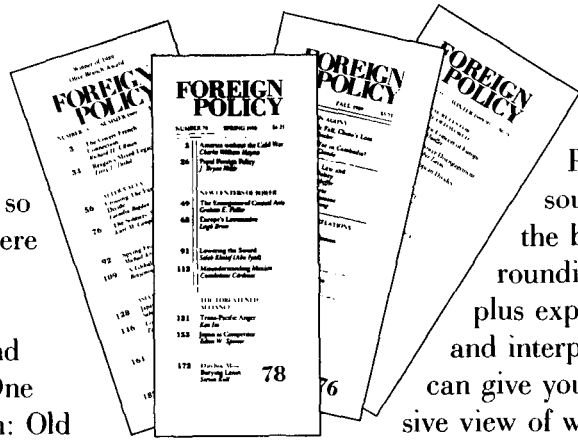

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come (his private goal) the most influential Negro in world history, with the unlimited power, fame, and access to attractive, willing civil-rights workers that would entail. He was ready to do anything—absolutely anything—to hold on to his status and power: run roughshod over longstanding southern traditions, violate disorderly conduct ordinances, provoke violent responses from mild-mannered policemen, bed down sexy white women from prestigious publications—whatever was necessary. Now 34, he had already earned himself a cover story in *Time* magazine, made hundreds of speeches a year, led a successful boycott of the segregated bus system in Montgomery. But that was years ago, in the mid-fifties, and his rapid rise had been slowed. Cities across the South were still segregated, and other leaders—John Lewis, Roy Wilkins, Harry Belafonte—and strategies—the sit-ins in Nashville and Greensboro, voter registration drives in Mississippi—had captured press attention. King was no longer the center of attention, and a friend recalled, "he could not stand it."

And, these days he was being branded a loser, and all because he had been outsmarted by a white man several months earlier in Albany, Ga. Laurie Pritchett, the white sheriff, went out of his way to avoid brutality with the marchers. And each time King was arrested, Pritchett freed him in short order, before the national press could turn him into a martyr. King emerged from jail each time deeply depressed. His solitary day-long prayer vigil in front of the jail, with him begging on his knees to be arrested, didn't work either, no matter what provocative stunts he pulled—calling Sheriff Pritchett a "white redneck faggot" or shouting out to white schoolgirls passing by the vigil, "Hey, little girl, want to try a real man?"

Now Birmingham loomed ahead, and as he drove north towards the tough steel city, population 350,000, that occupied a 15-mile stretch of Jones Valley, and that with its suburbs attained a maximum width of seven miles, the city posed obstacles as durable and firm as the iron ore and coal underneath the land outside Birmingham. It was a hard, forbidding land, and on the 101.4 mile drive to Birmingham from Montgomery (site of his original triumph that he visited obsessively since moving to Atlanta), one passed gently rolling farmland until encountering the daunting 952-foot-high Red Mountain, home of the Birmingham elite. It was an elite built on mineral wealth, a wealth that was made possible by the formation some 500,000,000 years ago during the Silurian era of beds of iron ore. A broad, shallow sea covered portions of Alabama then, and . . . [Note to editor: have your secretary recopy attached section of *Geology in Alabama,* University of Alabama Press, pp. 2-5, through sentence beginning, "The seas from the Paleozoic age . . . " Thanks a lot!] As the eons passed, and the submerged sections of the eastern United States emerged from their watery covers, more layers of limestone, shale, gravel and coal were left as part of this prehistoric legacy. It was a legacy that continued to shape the politics of race in Birmingham.

As King well knew, Birmingham was the city with the most determined resistance to integration in the entire state, perhaps in the entire South. And yet both races had made their peace with the venerable tradition, and many Negro leaders resented this outside intrusion. But most critically, if King was to win in Birmingham, he would have to beat a person at least as formidable as himself, a saintly, legendary figure who embodied all that the citizens of the state felt was best about themselves and their state, the ultimate "good ole boy," and one of the most popular political leaders in Alabama if not the entire South, Eugene "Bull" Connor, known simply as "Mr. Alabama," or by some, "The God of Birmingham."

The story of Bull Connor

In the twilight of an Alabama evening in 1911, in a small (pop. 762) farming town near Selma, a tall, jug-eared, raw-boned youth of 14 was chopping wood with powerful strokes, helping his father build a log cabin to store some of the cotton they grew. Even as a youngster, Eugene Connor was "plenty strong," his cousin Luke Connor recalled. He was "as big as an ox," a friend said. "He was tough as nails," said yet another friend contacted by this reporter. Bubba Connor and his son Eugene were drawn to the quiet beauty of the land, the long rolling vistas of farmland and the inspiring sight of pines—longleaf, shortleaf, loblolly, upland spruce, lowland spruce, pond, slash and sand pine—that dot the countryside. In the forests and fields, the gentle-souled youth ("He was really a pussycat at heart," says one childhood friend) with the gruff, extroverted exterior first learned the values of hard work, private property, free enterprise—and helping others. The sight of an injured bird made him cry profusely, and he was always bringing home animals to nurse back to health, part of the gentle side of his personality that he kept hidden from the public.

Times were not easy for Connor and his father: his mother died when he was eight; money was always tight. Yet somehow they managed to eke out a small living with dignity, unlike, he said later, many of the Negro sharecroppers who farmed nearby, who turned to drunken revelry to escape their plight. Nevertheless, he was still able to ache with empathy over the suffering they had to endure. As a youngster, young Eugene also watched from afar as Negro children in the neighborhood played baseball, listened to them

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sing blues songs and "hollers," and became a great admirer of their athletic skills and singing abilities.

Equally important in shaping his views on racial issues was his respect—even awe—for the written word. Although his education was only rudimentary in the Plantersville schoolhouse (as he could only attend school a few months each year), he developed a fierce devotion to the Bible and its injunction against the "curse of Ham," or black skin. And by the lamplight in the evenings, he also read himself to sleep perusing history books about how Alabama was overrun by white carpetbaggers and their Negro minions during the Reconstruction era—and about why the state's segregation laws were so necessary to preserve order. His reverence for these books and laws was as great as that for his beloved Bible. Yet even while his deep-seated conservative belief in segregation was being formed, he never lost his basic respect for his dark-skinned neighbors' underlying humanity. As he grew older and assumed political power, he became, in many respects, a pioneer of the tough-minded neoconservatives who have helped bring America's attention to the social pathologies of the underclass.

Photo courtesy of AP/Wide World Photos

King outside agitator provoking innocent dog

Beyond his foresighted political ideas, this powerful natural leader, even as a youngster, was highly regarded for another reason: his bubbling, outgoing personality and sense of humor. Whenever a crowd of young people in the town gathered, you could "always find Bull in the center," one friend said, telling stories and jokes. He'd tug at his right ear lobe, scratch his belly and start in recounting jokes from a seemingly bottomless stockpile. "Now, here's a puzzle for you: a Polack, a Jewboy, and a nigger all jumped off a cliff at the same time," he'd announce in his warm, booming voice, a small delighted smile curling up the edge of his lips. "Which one hits the ground first?" The rapt crowd would shout out different answers and then Connor would cut them off with a loud exclamation: "The answer is . . . WHO CARES?" Connor and his pals would then explode with laughter, and Connor had earned himself more friends. He viewed the use of racial epithets and jokes as an ironic way to raise a positive sense of awareness of the ethnic diversity in the South, rather than, as some later critics charged, a form of insults or hostility to minority groups.

By his mid-teens, desperate for money, he moved to Birmingham, where he landed a series of low-paying jobs as a newspaper boy, telegraph operator, and crossmaker for the local Ku Klux Klan. He brought the same attention to detail to everything he did: "Eugene made the best-looking crosses in the whole county," recalled former Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton. "Not a nail was out of place and the spiked end was as sharp as a knife. Other crosses might wobble and fall apart when they started to burn, but, by golly, a Connor cross was a sight to behold." All the while, his jovial personality won him new friends, and by the time he was 21, he landed the job that gave him his colorful nickname, "Bull." He became a baseball radio announcer, recreating from a ticker tape the events of far-away games in a gruff, booming voice that sounded like a "bull." He also got "mad as a bull" when he saw anyone do something to provoke violence. "The Lord meant for us to live together peacefully," he'd say, whenever he saw a fight beginning. He "would never harm a fly," one friend recalled, except, of course, when deliberately provoked. Martin Luther King, fueled by his media-crazed dreams of martyrdom, would turn out, sadly, to be just such a *provocateur*.

Conner became the most beloved person in the city. Wherever he went, women would rush out of their homes to throw rose petals at his feet, while men would doff their hats slowly in a gesture of respect, and whisper to themselves in awe-filled voices, "There goes Bull." Connor would have been content to remain a baseball announcer and a revered folk hero, but the citizens of the town knew he was

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destined for greater things. One evening in 1934, a delegation of fellow citizens, concerned that the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt with his pro-Negro wife could lead to the overthrow of the state's segregation statutes and to mandatory viewing of Paul Robeson movies in the public schools, came to Bull and asked him to run for the state legislature. Bull agonized for days over it, and finally he gave in to their pleas. Of course he won, but he soon realized that the state legislature, which was controlled by big-spending lobbyists, wasn't for him. He left behind one proud legacy: a ban on viewing the films "Showboat" and "The Emperor Jones" in any public school in Alabama. He was prepared to return to his life as a happy-go-lucky baseball announcer when his friends prevailed on him again and he reluctantly spent 20 hours a day, 7 days a week campaigning for the job of commissioner of public safety. Connor hated traditional politics, and yet, somehow, he found himself elected, then reelected time and time again—almost against his will—until by 1963 he was the most powerful and popular politician in Birmingham.

He would have preferred to return to his family's small farm in Plantersville with his wife Beara now that he was in his sixties, but duty called on him to remain in office. All the Southern traditions he had cherished faced their biggest challenge yet—the invasion of Birmingham by the short, wily, balding Martin Luther King Jr. . . .

The whirlwind

As King entered Birmingham on the afternoon of April 2, he had, friends recalled, only one thing on his mind: who would he sleep with that night? King's extramarital affairs had been well-known to a close-knit group of hard-partying buddies, such as Ralph Abernathy, and, ultimately, to J. Edgar Hoover's FBI. Hoover later would try to blackmail King into giving up his civil rights campaign—by threatening to personally go on late-night TV to hawk a salacious "party record," *Gettin' Down With Dr. King*, based on the Bureau's wiretaps of King's sexual encounters—but King, quietly proud of his sexual abilities, would remain unfazed by such threats. His long-suffering wife, Coretta, must have known about his erotic escapades, friends say, but she had too much pride and dignity to say anything about them. She viewed herself as his helpmate, having abandoned a potentially distinguished singing career for him, but he often treated her cavalierly. "Sorry, dear, I've got to organize another demonstration," he would say, leaving her in the wreckage of their firebombed living room to rush out for yet another sexual conquest. His active traveling and speaking schedule provided a perfect cover for his amorous ramblings. And so it was on April 2, when he headed towards the Gaston Motel, headquarters for the Birmingham campaign. Tonight's late-night rendezvous was with either Joan Baez or Nancy Wilson or maybe both (Abernathy was the one who handled the scheduling details for him), but before he could indulge his appetites, he had to spend hours talking with the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth and other local ministers about the strategies for the mass demonstrations and sit-ins—a task he found far more boring than showboating as a stump speaker, granting interviews, and, of course, having sex.

To King and his cohorts, the laws of Birmingham—and of Alabama—were made to be broken. King had always disdained legal niceties in his drive to power: he casually violated tax laws, for instance, when during the Montgomery bus boycott era he took, one aide recalled, "lots and lots of dollars" in donations destined for his puppet organizations, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Montgomery Improvement Association, and mixed them in with his personal bank accounts. As other biographers have noted—but sought to explain away—he was forced to pay both the state and the IRS a total of $2,167.83 in back taxes; he subsequently faced a perjury trial for falsifying his tax records, a trial King's apologists—then and now—have sought to portray as merely state government harassment of an innocent idealist. Now he was eager to overthrow the laws—such as those on disorderly conduct and racial segregation—that had made Birmingham such a pleasant, old-fashioned place for so many of its citizens, the laws that kindly Bull Connor had cherished as a youngster and was sworn to uphold.

To win this campaign, King would use money—lots of it. It was money—and the ability to raise it—that was the basic source of Martin Luther King's power and effectiveness. He has been described as a great orator, a brilliant strategist, a leader of men. King, admittedly, *was* all these things, but his abilities would have had far less impact without the money to back them up. King's fabled "charisma" and moral appeal, now part of the national political folklore, were, in fact, merely the decorative velvet fabric that encased the steel fist of raw power.

Despite his enormous financial resources, in the first few days King's bold campaign seemed to fizzle. Only a relative handful of protesters showed up, many of them white college students and beatniks sporting berets and bongo drums. News reporters who had come to Birmingham expecting violent clashes between peaceful protesters and Connor's troops instead spent their days napping, playing cards, and complaining to King about the lack of exciting news.

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WHO'S WHO

The Washington Times has found evidence that **Don Riegle**, the senator from Michigan, lied to the Senate Ethics committee about his involvement in **Charles Keating**'s savings and loan scandal. And *The Wall Street Journal* has discovered that Riegle's former aide **Kevin Gottlieb** received $85,000 in consulting fees from the American Banker's Association during the 18 months between the time he resigned as the senator's aide and the time he became staff director of the Senate Banking Committee. . . .

Jennifer Fitzgerald, who is widely reputed to be **George Bush**'s former mistress, now works as deputy chief of protocol at the State Department, where she is not going to win Miss Congeniality. "If anyone threatens to cross her," says one colleague, "she immediately threatens to call the president."

Fitzgerald is said to view official trips abroad as shopping opportunities. Recently, she was fined by customs agents who noticed that she had not declared a silver fox cape worth $1,300 and had underestimated by $800 the value of a nutria-lined raincoat. . . .

A few issues ago, this magazine named Senator **Bob Kerrey** of Nebraska as a possible Democratic vice presidential nominee in 1992. His supporters may be taking higher aim these days. No one else appears to be rushing to become the party's presidential candidate, so there's an open field for Kerrey. And he has been receiving good press from influential writers, including **George Will** and **David Broder**'s heir-apparent at *The Washington Post*, **Paul Taylor**. Party leaders are joining in the chorus. "He has the rare ability to touch people when he speaks," says one Democratic National Committee member.

Some observers say that even Kerrey's most glaring deficiency—his vagueness about the specifics of the government action he favors—could turn into an asset in that he could be that empty vessel into which voters pour their hopes, as they did with **Jimmy Carter** in 1976 and with **Michael Dukakis** in the 1988 primaries.

Readers of this magazine, for example, are not likely to be repelled by this statement Paul Taylor made about Kerrey:

"His fervent belief in the obligation of the federal government to do something is matched only by his fervent skepticism about the ability of the federal government to do anything.". . .

Early indications are that **Gerard Scannell** at the Occupational Safety and Health Administration will be tougher on violations than his predecessor and that **James L. Kolstad** at the National Transportation Safety Board will be softer than his. . . .

Another contrast can be made between two assistant secretaries at State. **Bernard Aronson** is generally thought to have done a good job handling the situation in postelection Nicaragua, while **Richard Solomon** is said to be embarrassingly sweaty in his defense of the administration's indulgence of the Khmer Rouge. . . .

Ede Holiday, who this month replaces **David Bates** as secretary to the cabinet, may be the first woman to attain real power in the Bush White House. She obviously thinks her prospects are bright, since she gave up being general counsel at Treasury to take the White House post. . . .

Informed observers agree that **Fred T. Goldberg**, the commissioner of internal revenue, is a good man who is trying hard to straighten out the mess at the Internal Revenue Service. But taxpayers who burn the midnight oil preparing their returns are not likely to be be charmed by his recent confession that he has so little tolerance for paperwork that he has someone else prepare his. . . .

Robert Teeter, Bush's poll master who used to make regular visits to the Oval Office, has become an infrequent face about town. He is said to be another loser to **John Sununu**, whose power continues unabated. **William Reilly**, who used to be a pest by advocating tough environmental reforms, was welcomed into the tent following his performance at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Reilly "passed the litmus test" by toeing the line, and some say, not speaking his mind. . . .

Samuel Skinner is being readied to head Bush's 1992 reelection bid. Skinner's wife, **Honey Jacobs**, a partner at Sidley & Austin, has become a proficient fundraiser, and some say Skinner may even replace **Lee Atwater** at the Republican National Committee should the chairman opt to step down. . . .

Ins—*Commerce:* Assistant Secretary for Economic Development—**L. Joyce Hampers.** *Education:* Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights—**Michael L. Williams.** *Health and Human Services:* Assistant Secretary for Family Support—**Jo Anne B. Barnhart.** *Housing and Urban Development:* Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing—**Joseph G. Schiff.** *Justice:* Deputy Attorney General—**William P. Barr.** *White House:* Assistant to the President and Secretary to the Cabinet—**Ede Holiday.** *Agencies and Commissions:* Director, Drug Enforcement Administration—**Robert Bonner.**

Outs—*White House:* Assistant to the President and Secretary to the Cabinet—**David Q. Bates Jr.** *Justice:* Deputy Attorney General—**Donald B. Ayer.** *Transportation:* Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs—**David P. Prosperi.** *Agencies and Commissions:* Director, Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency—**Craig Fields.**

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Fortunately for King, Connor, the media naif, made a critical mistake: he asked for—and won—an injunction banning all picketing and demonstrations. At a strategy meeting that evening, King and his aides celebrated this new opportunity. But they faced a serious political challenge: how best to get the most publicity for violating the court order? King, as usual, volunteered to be arrested. (He, in fact, did go to jail for a few days until freed on bond.) But King's jailing, they decided, wouldn't be enough, even if King was willing to grimace wildly in pain for the cameras, an act that, after eight years of protests, was getting a little stale. Suddenly, King had a brainstorm: "Why not use *children* against Bull Connor's police? It wouldn't hurt our cause if a few little black girls could be injured or maimed, right?" Shuttlesworth, among others, protested against the cruel cynicism of this idea, but King's forceful personality soon convinced the others to join this scheme. Children as young as six years of age would be allowed to join, they decided. King and his aides heavily recruited marchers among Birmingham's schoolchildren, promising them free candy, extra allowance money, and no more homework, ever, if they joined the march. Not surprisingly, nearly a thousand kids signed up and took off from school.

That morning, Bull Connor kissed his wife Beara goodbye, not knowing if he would ever return alive from the potential confrontation he yet hoped to defuse. Connor, who had always enjoyed friendly relationships with what he called "pickaninnies," rubbing their heads for good luck and giving them candy, hoped to convince these schoolchildren to stop marching and return to school with a few diverting pranks he had planned. He ordered the K-9 units of dogs to set up outside the church, in the hope that the sight of cute little dogs—little more than puppies, really—would distract the children and encourage them to stop their protests to play with the frisky critters. Then, as an added treat, he ordered his fire department to use big black fire hoses to douse them with water on this hot spring day, because there were no swimming pools in Birmingham that little black children could use.

Bull Connor miscalculated. It was with a sinking heart that Connor realized that his plan for a recreational diversion was being greeted hostilely by the black schoolchildren—"they're cute as buttons," he often told his wife—that he so loved. They taunted his police and firemen, booed him, threw rocks at the K-9 units. A few dogs, prodded out of control by jeering children, leaped to take bites out of their clothing as photographers snapped pictures. The water from the fire hoses, apparently too strong for the gentle water-play Connor had envisioned, forced some children to roll down the street under its force, injuring some, frightening many. There were many critics who later argued that Connor's police force had violated elementary principles of justice and fair play, and, indeed, no matter how well-meaning his intention, Connor's response to the protesters revealed that, perhaps, he did not adequately grasp those concepts. Politically, there was no doubt that Connor had made a tragic mistake.

King, on the other hand, was overjoyed. Television and newspapers were filled with pictures of supposedly innocent black children being blasted with water hoses and chased by police dogs. Millions of Americans were outraged, and the world's press descended on the once-calm city of Birmingham as the demonstrations grew in size each day. Bull Connor, once the hero of Birmingham and Alabama, had become an archaic liability, outwitted by the media-savvy King. No longer would white and black people live separately in Birmingham, taking nourishment from their own rich cultures, but, instead, centuries of tradition would be hurtled aside in a media stampede engineered by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Connor decried the desegregation agreement as "capitulation by certain weak-kneed white people," but, by this time, he was almost a broken man.

For years afterward, he sought to redress the injury done to his reputation by King and King's admirers in the national press. He pursued a libel suit against *The New York Times*, but that ultimately was rejected in federal court. The city-commission form of government that had made him so powerful was rejected by the voters, and he was defeated in an attempt to become mayor.

The 1963 Birmingham campaign marked the end of the old ways of politics and ushered in a new era of media and money, but the man who was victimized by this shift lived for another 10 years. He returned as often as he could to his farm in Plantersville, where, amid the pines and gently rolling farmland, he strolled hand-in-hand with his wife Beara, still very much in love after all these years. At night, on his front porch, his whole family—his daughter and two grandchildren included—and a few old friends would gather to drink rye whiskey and tell stories. Even in his seventies, Bull Connor never lost the charm and wit that had made him so popular, such a legend, for so many years.

"Say, Luke," he'd joke to his cousin with a broad smile, "what do you say to a nigger in a three-piece suit?"

"I dunno, Bull. What?"

"Will the defendant please rise!" Then the whole family would erupt in joyous laughter, just like in the good old days before Martin Luther King ruined everything. □

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TIDBITS & OUTRAGES

HEAVY METAL

One of the newest U.S. Army bands is called "Camouflage," described by the U.S. Army Public Affairs Office as "a rock ensemble that plays the latest rock songs" while wearing "a modified battle dress uniform, complete with face paint and camouflage netting."

THINGS TO DO:
1) TAPE LETTERMAN SHOW
2) DIVE-BOMB AMERICAN NAVAL BASE

Sony has apologized for using Dec. 7 in a VCR owner's manual in the section on how to set the date.

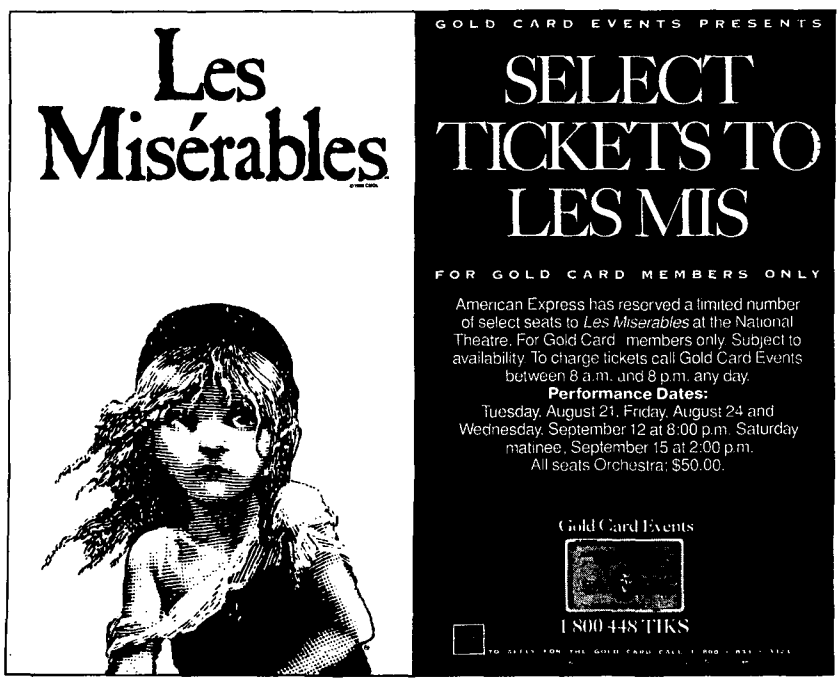
THE LIES HAVE IT

The Austin, Texas city council voted down a proposed ordinance that would have forbidden witnesses from knowingly giving false testimony.

YEAH, WELL, WE JUST THOUGHT THE SPOT SHOWING HIM BREAKING JELL-O WASN'T AS IMPRESSIVE

Although a paid ad for Peruvian presidential contender Alberto Fujimori showed him using karate to break a brick, he later admitted that he did not know karate and that the brick had been broken in advance.

WOULD YOU LIKE US TO PUT THAT BREAD ON YOUR ACCOUNT, MR. VALJEAN?



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MISSION IMPROBABLE

Why—10 years after Desert One—the U.S. still isn't ready to fight the war against terrorism

By James Bennet

The Cold War is over and you're ready for bed. So you pat the dog, kiss the wife, and set the alarm for a half hour later than usual. You pull the down comforter up to your chin and wriggle slightly, enjoying the rough feel of your new flannel PJs. Idly, you picture yourself casting, the line arcing through the air—20 yards, no, 50 *yards—the lure striking the water . . . here he comes, big fellah, big ole bass . . . the phone rings. The wife sighs. It's Brent Scowcroft, sounding more tense than usual. You listen. Softly you mutter, "Darn Eye-rainians." You get out of bed and, robed, shuffle off for the Situation Room, trailed by the officer with the launch codes.*

Actually, the Iranians evidently have nothing to do with this one. Meeting you at the door, Scowcroft explains that a group of terrorists have hijacked a Lloyd Aero Boliviano 727 bound for Miami from La Paz. On board are at least 40 Americans, including several businessmen and economists who were in Bolivia for a round of debt-reduction talks. The plane is now flying a crazy, zig-zag route up the spine of South America. You ask Scowcroft about the available military options, and he starts to look really nervous. Shouldn't we alert Delta Force? you ask. Can't they handle the job? Scowcroft quickly answers yessir to the first question. Then he clears his throat and gives you the only truthful answer available to the second one, which is that. . . .

There's no way of knowing, because Delta hasn't tried to rescue any hostages since the botched mission to Iran. But if the record of America's counterterrorist commandos through the eighties is any indication, the outlook's pretty grim. The United States has had a decade to apply the brutal lessons of Desert One to building counterterrorist forces that can supply the "swift and effective retribution" promised by Ronald Reagan—that can give the military the capacity for the quick-hit missions, ranging from rescue to retaliation, that it so clearly lacked. More than a billion dollars has gone to develop two commando units—Delta Force, which grew out of the Army, and SEAL Team Six, drawn from the Navy—and the support they require. The need for a better response to terrorism certainly hasn't disappeared: During the 1980s, terrorists killed 571 Americans around the world.

James Bennet is an editor of The Washington Monthly. *Research assistance provided by Bill Yelverton.*

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So with all that incentive, all that spending, and all that time, could we get the hostages out of Iran today? "No, no," says a former member of the Special Operations command, who, like most of his comrades, wouldn't allow his name to be printed since he continues to advise the command informally. The troops themselves, by all accounts, are excellent; the problems lie not with the men who pull the triggers but with the command that controls them and, ultimately, with the political leadership. Their Rambo rhetoric notwithstanding, first Ronald Reagan and now George Bush never pushed hard or long enough to bust through the roadblocks that cut off the Iran rescue mission at Desert One. Left to its own devices in the late eighties, the military side of the American counterterrorist effort became "a boondoggle," says a Defense Department source with several years' experience in special operations. "This whole force, the way it's configured, is a disaster." Even the more charitable assessments don't inspire much confidence. "If you put the right leadership in and give them five years, we'll have the forces we need," says Col. Charlie Beckwith, who led the troops on the ground in Iran. "And I think we've got the right leadership now." Five *more* years?

But you need those commandos in the air now. The plane, low on fuel, has requested permission to land in Caracas. Perez probably won't let American troops fight on his soil, but there's a chance he'd at least take some advice, if you could get a team there fast enough. You've gotten a clearer picture of the situation from information that's dribbled in as the pilot communicates with air-traffic controllers in Lima and Quito: There are at least four terrorists, all members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). A communist guerrilla movement with close ties to Colombia's drug lords, the FARC has conducted a number of kidnappings and assassinations of Colombians and even some attacks on Americans over the past few years. Unfortunately, you don't know much more about the FARC than that. You do know that the terrorists are armed with handguns and grenades and apparently are carrying some sort of explosive, since they keep threatening to blow up the plane.

On an open line from Simon Bolivar International Airport, Kenneth Skoag, the chargé d'affaires, informs you that the Venezuelans have deployed their army to block all runways. The jet comes in anyway in an effort to force a landing—maybe hoping the barricades will be lifted at the last moment, as they were in Beirut during that nightmare TWA hijacking five years ago—but the pilot loses his game of chicken and pulls up at the last moment, banking to the northwest. Given his dwindling fuel supply, he must be planning to land at either Aruba or Curacao—neither of which has a standing military capable of dealing with the crisis. The U.S. might have to act, not just advise, after all.

Stealth vs. Sikhs

"Oddly enough," says Robert Kupperman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, "we may yet yearn for a bipolar, Cold War world." Besides flooding the international arms market with sophisticated weapons, the retreat of the superpowers is creating a vacuum in which ethnic nationalist groups around the world—Tamils, Croatians, Igbos, Azerbaijanis, Sikhs—can press their demands. Many of their grievances are legitimate, but, as the Lithuanians are discovering, their desires for independence may not be fulfilled overnight. It's in that gap between a pressing, legitimate cause and its satisfaction that terrorism flourishes. As terrorist and insurgent groups like the PLO, the Shining Path in Peru, the New People's Army in the Philippines, and the Basque Fatherland and Liberty in northern Spain learned long ago, there's no better way to grab attention in the telecommunications age than with a sudden act of spectacular violence. Today, the means to do so are becoming more accessible and more deadly (see "Beyond Hijacking," p. 24).

In the United States, responsibility for dealing with international terrorism is parceled out, with some duplication, primarily among the CIA, the FBI, the Pentagon, the State Department, and the National Security Council. Of these, the Department of Defense seems least likely to play a continuous, useful role. Military force won't win the war on terrorism, just as hiring more cops alone will never put an end to urban crime. To sleep more peacefully, the world's leaders must recognize the just grievances at the core of many terrorist actions; the best commandos in the world—the British SAS and the Israeli paratroopers—haven't managed to subdue or placate Catholics in Northern Ireland or Palestinians on the West Bank.

But that doesn't mean the president should be deprived of an off-the-shelf military option, and that terrorists should be relieved of worrying about one, when Americans are threatened abroad. When a group of angry Sikhs threatens to blow up the U.S. embassy in New Delhi, you don't want to have to wait for the State Department to negotiate peace in the Punjab; you want to have a good intelligence network in place, solid logistical support, and a counterterrorist team that's armed and ready to go. The release of American hostages by terrorist groups in Lebanon may prove that the U.S. doesn't always need good counterterrorist forces; but the fact that the

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Americans were captive as long as three and a half years—and that others continue to be held hostage—suggests that those forces would be nice to have. Sure, the Czechoslovaks have stopped exporting Semtex; but they had already sent one million pounds of it to Libya, and, as Vaclav Havel pointed out, it takes only about six ounces to blow up an airplane. And while American customs agents may be able to stem the flow of nuclear triggers to Iraq, they can't shut down Iraq's nuclear weapons program or deter Saddam Hussein from using or selling the binary chemical weapons he calls "the fire."

As Sam Nunn commented in a 1986 Senate speech, since "Special Operations Forces"—including counterterrorist commandos—are more likely to conduct missions than conventional troops, "our entire armed forces—and hence our military capacity—will be judged on whether these forces succeed or fail." After four years, that message seems finally to have made it across the Potomac to the defense department, only to be transformed into a marketing ploy. The Pentagon is still pushing to build Stealth bombers, but now with the added claim that they'd make great counterterrorist weapons. "Right now, I don't think [Richard Cheney] has a clear idea of what the military needs of the future are, of how important terrorism and low-intensity conflict will be," says Gen. Edward "Shy" Meyer, former Army chief of staff. Indeed, the history of America's efforts to develop commando units should serve as a cautionary

Beyond Hijacking

Igor Khripunov, first secretary at the Soviet embassy in Washington, D.C., tells an interesting story. It seems that, given the spirit of the times, an Eastern Bloc country decided to cancel an order it had placed for 12 Soviet-built tanks, to the great disappointment of the management of the factory that had produced them. "They were rather desperate as to how to dispose of these tanks," says Khripunov. So they turned to an international "mediator" who found them a buyer, an unnamed, third country. The factory secretly shipped the tanks to the Black Sea, where they would have been picked up by the buyer's freighter—had the KGB not caught on. According to Khripunov, deals like this are the result of the build-down of the superpowers' defenses, which is already glutting the international arms market and driving down prices for sophisticated weapons. "It's now a buyer's market," he says. Welcome to the multipolar world.

Tanks, of course, are not likely to become the terrorist weapon of choice. Terrorists prefer lethal weapons that are easy to conceal and transport and are unlikely to backfire on their users. The proliferation of a variety of weapons that satisfy these requirements is increasing the chances that some will fall into terrorists' hands. Terrorism, measured in terms of numbers of acts committed, declined in the second half of the 1980s, as it did in the second half of the 1970s. However, the overall changes are disturbing. "There's a trend toward killing people," observes Bruce Hoffman, a terrorism expert with the Rand Corporation. The number of terrorist incidents increased by a third in the 1980s over the 1970s; meanwhile, the number of incidents that left people dead climbed 75 percent, and the total number slain by terrorists doubled.

There are more terrorist organizations today than there were 10 years ago, and they are more technically sophisticated. They are also more likely to play for higher stakes. Contrary to their reputation, terrorists tend to be conservative in their methods, relying on familiar tactics. And most experts used to think they wouldn't resort to weapons of mass destruction, because they had no goal that could justify the carnage. But now, more nationalist groups around the world are trying to carve out their own states. "All of a sudden, you have a demand of a high enough order that it makes sense," says Hoffman. In addition to plastic explosives, terrorists might turn to any of the following to push such demands:

➤CHEMICAL WEAPONS: These include mustard gas, cyanide, phosgene, and nerve agents like Tabun, Sarin, and the extremely lethal VX, stockpiled by the U.S. Army, a drop of which on the skin can kill. Today, 15 to 30 nations—ranging in size from China to Burma and including, of course, Libya—have chemical weapons. The superpowers control the vast majority of the world's chemical stockpiles: the U.S.S.R. has about 50,000 tons, the U.S. about 30,000. (Because it is trying to bolster its arsenal, the U.S., after pushing for worldwide controls on exports of the building blocks for these weapons, is now in the ironic position of having either to import more chemical agents or to sue Amer-

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tale to anyone who expects the Pentagon to make good on its promises of trimming down to lean, flexible fighting forces.

It sure is sunny in Curacao, where CNN has once again beaten the U.S. military to the scene. Standing beside the plane, one of the terrorists issues the group's demands in excellent English: the release of several members of the FARC being held in Colombia; the withdrawal of all American advisers and drug interdiction officers in Colombia and Peru; the destruction of all military equipment supplied by the United States to Colombia; and the pardoning of Gen. Manuel Noriega. One of the terrorists' demands—a full tank of fuel—has evidently already been met. The young man swears to begin killing one passenger every four hours. To underscore the point, his comrades dump a bloody corpse onto the tarmac behind him. Moments later, you learn that the dead man was a banker from Columbus, Ohio. The ball's in your court, Mr. President.

You glance around the room. Colonel Needels, the gung-ho NSC aide, is yelling into a telephone. It seems that for some reason Delta still is not airborne. Scowcroft grabs your arm, and you look back at the television screen. The 727's wheels are just leaving the tarmac.

For most of the eighties, America's counterterrorist forces were on the defensive, waging a covert war for survival. Their battles weren't fought in the streets of Beirut or on the shores of Tripoli, but in the

ican companies to produce them.) The performance of these weapons tends to be unpredictable (because they are dependent on weather conditions) and large quantities are needed to do widespread harm; last year, the Iraqis used several thousand tons, delivered by ballistic missiles, to kill about 3,000 Kurds.

➤BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS: In military cost/benefit terms, these provide the broadest coverage area per pound of payload of any weapons system, including nuclear bombs. From one bomb, the dispersion of anthrax (which can be extracted from an infected cow and then grown) could kill up to a million people. Islands contaminated with anthrax in tests by Britain during World War II are still uninhabitable. Biological weapons also include cholera, plague, and Q fever; saxitoxin, a toxin made from shellfish, is said to be 1,000 times more potent than even the Army's VX. At least 10 developing nations are trying to make biological weapons. One advantage they have over chemical weapons is that the agents that produce them can be used for legitimate purposes, so export controls can't stop their spread; and unlike nuclear weapons, biological ones emit no telltale radiation that make them traceable. They can be delivered, like chemical weapons, by bombs or missiles, or in discrete quantities placed in ventilation systems. One significant drawback from the terrorist perspective is that they are very dangerous to handle.

➤NUCLEAR WEAPONS: These can achieve even more effectively than biological weapons the basic objective of terrorists—sowing terror. To do that, terrorists need only convince their target government that they can explode a bomb—and there's a fair amount of convincing information already in circulation; simply sending the relevant official a scrawled version of the diagrams printed years ago in *The New York Review of Books* or *The Progressive* could go a long way.

Still, there's nothing like the real thing. The recent attempt by Iraq—the same nation that used chemical agents on its own people—to buy trigger components for nuclear weapons demonstrates that vigorous export controls can slow, but probably not stop, a nation's efforts to get the bomb. Some nations have tighter controls than others; between 1977 and 1980 a West German businessman shipped an entire nuclear plant, piece by piece, to Pakistan. In 1987, a U.S. Task Force on Nuclear Terrorism concluded that with three or four specialists, a terrorist group could build a crude nuclear bomb; the trick lies in getting the fuel (to kick off their nuclear weapons program, the Israelis stole plutonium from the United States). No one knows if a terrorist group could steal an atomic weapon, since the command and control systems of the five to eight nations that probably stockpile them are classified. But consider this fact: One of the largest stockpiles of the Soviets' 33,000 nuclear weapons is outside Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. The weapons stashed there may number in the thousands. Rebels in the area have already attacked one military installation housing nuclear weapons.

—*J.B.*

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halls of the Pentagon. "The enemies are not overseas grabbing hostages or this and that," explains a retired Green Beret colonel who follows special operations. "The enemies are the other branches of the services." Counterterrorist forces (and special operations forces generally) are a threat to the conventional military—a budget threat.

To survive the struggle for a slice of the department's funding, any defense project needs friends in high places willing to fight for it. Since special operations don't revolve around large units wielding sophisticated, expensive hardware in conventional conflicts, they forfeit the support of crucial advocates: defense contractors and most congressmen, who want to keep the assembly lines humming, and generals and admirals, who expect to command sizable forces that fight in the fashion in which they themselves trained. Still, thanks to a few powerful believers in counterterrorist and other special operations forces on the Hill, Congress kept appropriating money for them during the 1980s. But, somehow, the money kept disappearing into the conventional military. Nowhere was this struggle for survival more apparent than in the commandos' efforts to get dependable transportation.

Whoosh-whoosh, crash-crash

Although the cause of failure of the rescue attempt in Iran lay deeper, it manifested itself most obviously in the miserable airlift. Of eight helicopters on the mission, one apparently suffered a cracked blade; another lost its navigational system; a crucial hydraulic pump failed on a third. That left only five helicopters to press on from the refueling site, Desert One. Since the mission required at least six, the rescue force tried to abort. A helicopter collided with a C-130 transport, sending up an enormous fireball. The heat was so intense that no one could retrieve the bodies or intelligence material that, discovered later in the wreckage, probably led to the executions of some pro-American Iranians.

Never again, right? Well, during the *Achille Lauro* affair in October 1985, American counterterrorist forces were held up for 18 hours when their airplane broke down; on reaching Egypt, they had no helicopter with enough range to get them to the scene. One month later, Palestinian terrorists hijacked an Egyptair plane with American passengers aboard to Malta. Three Air Force planes that were supposed to carry American commandos to the scene couldn't fly. Rather than wait any longer for advice, Egyptian commandos blasted the doors off the plane and killed 60 passengers.

"The primary culprit in this sad story, unfortunately," said Sam Nunn on the Senate floor in 1986, "is the Air Force." He called the state of special operations airlift—then no better than at Desert One six years before—"a shameful indictment of Air Force priorities." Indeed, as *Military Logistics Forum* reported that year, the Air Force had ranked airlift for special operations 59th on its list of priorities for funding in fiscal year 1985. Items 53 and 54 paid for ferrying top Air Force officers and officials—and 60 was a modernization program for airplanes used to spray Agent Orange in Vietnam. The Air Force resisted the drudgery of its special ops "trash-hauling" responsibilities just as it has resisted the close-support role it's supposed to play for troops on the front line.

With some exceptions, the Air Force needed to modify or build only a few more planes and helicopters, models of which were already in service, to meet the special operations requirements; nevertheless, because they were few in number, special operations aircraft were expensive, so they would cut into other procurement programs. And those aircraft generally were not the sophisticated planes—the Stealth bombers and Advanced Tactical Fighters—that attract generals. "You're talking about prop planes, basically," says a congressional aide. "The people who make the decisions are mostly Air Force fighter and bomber pilots." Noel Koch, former deputy assistant secretary of defense for special operations and counterterrorist operations, is particularly bitter about Air Force resistance to building the helicopters crucial to counterterrorist missions. "They want all this fancy aircraft they can imitate with their hands," he says. "You know, 'whoosh, whoosh.'"

The "whoosh whoosh" mentality has meant that, despite Sam Nunn's "indictment" and despite an Air Force lieutenant general's confession before Congress in 1988 that less airlift was then available than at Desert One, the commandos still lack the aircraft they need to carry out their missions. They have at their disposal the same 10 AC–130 gunships and 14 MC–130 Combat Talons that they had before the mission to Iran. The newest Combat Talon airframe dates back to the mid-sixties. The Air Force blamed problems with the Combat Talon's high-tech radar for delaying efforts to build new planes during the eighties. But it wasn't exactly pushing to get those bugs ironed out; it assigned eight different managers to oversee the program in one four-year period.

Thanks mostly to congressional pressure, the commandos' air support is showing signs of improvement. Most promising, nine new "Pave Low" helicopters, which can carry troops at night into enemy territory, recently rolled off the lines. If all goes according to plan, 12 new gunships will be delivered

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between January 1992 and May 1993. The first new Combat Talon is scheduled to arrive this October; by August 1993—10 years after the initial contract was signed—the Air Force should have 22 new planes. Of course, that October delivery date is contingent on the Combat Talon passing some further tests. After a decade, the remaining problem sounds depressingly familiar. "There are some functions of the radar that have not yet been tested," says Col. Paul Beggs, the program director.

Just before the main U.S. forces attacked during Operation Just Cause in Panama, Delta Force commandos stormed a prison (El Carcel Modelo) to release a CIA operative named Kurt Muse, who had been held there since April. They freed Muse and bundled him onto a helicopter waiting on the roof. The helicopter took off—and promptly crashed, injuring the man the commandos were trying to save. Why did the chopper go down? "Overloaded—too much weight," says a retired special operations officer familiar with the raid. "If they pay attention to anything after all these years," he adds, shaking his head, "it should be airlift."

Already, Delta deployed once to Puerto Rico in hopes of nabbing a narcotraficante—and blundered into an FBI-DEA operation to grab the same man, reportedly almost starting a firefight.

With rivals like that . . .

You decide to grab a couple of hours of sleep while the hijacked jet, after buzzing Howard Air Force Base in Panama, continues north over Costa Rica. As you lie down, you reflect on that hostage crisis last November, when 12 Green Berets were trapped in the Sheraton Hotel in San Salvador by FMLN guerrillas. On Air Force One *you announced to reporters that our commandos had "liberated with finality" the Americans, only to learn that the FMLN had simply melted away, letting the Green Berets (surrounded for protection by the darn press!) slip out of the hotel. You were embarrassed when you learned the truth, but the bottom line was that you were pretty lucky—no one was hurt. You didn't feel nearly as lousy as you do now.*

Some aide wakes you with the news that, according to the pilot's radio broadcasts, the terrorists have murdered two more passengers. Delta, he says, has holed up at MacDill in Florida, waiting for their moving target to come to roost. After crossing into Mexican airspace, the hijacked plane suddenly cuts to the east over the Caribbean. Cuba seems to be the probable destination, but the pilot never communicates with Havana; he must be headed for Haiti or the Dominican Republic. You issue instructions to the ambassadors in each country: Make sure that jet isn't allowed to take off again; and get permission for Delta to attack. Supposedly, the relevant area specialists from State are on their way to the White House to help out.

The commandos' constant struggle to get adequate airlift reveals the fundamental liability of American counterterrorist forces. More than any other type of military operation, counterterrorist missions demand that a wide variety of tools—men and equipment drawn from several services and agencies—function together seamlessly. That they've never been able to is a telling demonstration of the gaps separating the many institutions, from the DEA to the Navy, responsible for U.S. national security. In a massive operation there's more room to accommodate interservice rivalries: Just about everybody—from special operations to the Marines to two of the Air Force's Stealth fighters (both of which missed their targets)—got a crack at Noriega's troops; and during the air raid on Libya in 1986, the Air Force and the Navy divided the Gulf of Sidra in half, so that each got the chance to strut its stuff. In such large operations, each service may perform well (as most did in Panama) or poorly (as both did over Libya); in general, they are less likely to stumble over each other (although, as in Grenada, they still can).

It's much harder to cram representatives from all the services into a small force moving quickly to counter a terrorist threat. Although the poor airlift and failure to rehearse an abort were the most obvious flaws of the Iranian rescue mission, the operation failed primarily because the planners tried to throw together Marine pilots flying Navy helicopters to rendezvous with Air Force planes carrying Army troops. They couldn't fuse all the elements—even though they had six months to do it.

Compare that operation with the most famous counterterrorist mission of the past 20 years: the Is-

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raeli raid on Entebbe airfield in 1976. In eight days, the Israelis managed to gather intelligence to support the raid; to rehearse the operation with a small band of paratroopers—a unit not specifically trained for counterterrorism; and to fly the team (with a Mercedes to disguise the first wave of attackers as Ugandan dignitaries) seven hours through a storm to land 30 seconds behind schedule in hostile territory precisely where the planners intended. The terrorists were all dead within three minutes of touch-down. Of course, there was a large element of luck working for the Israelis. And the mission was not nearly as complicated as the one the U.S. attempted in Iran. Still, the comparison seemed to demonstrate that while the Israeli armed services could pull off a seat-of-the-pants, flexible response to terrorism, the American armed services, as then constituted, couldn't.

At least, that's what the handful of special operations advocates in the Pentagon concluded after the Iranian fiasco. The less the counterterrorist forces had to depend on the rest of the military, the reasoning seems to have been, the more likely they were to succeed. Acting on the recommendations of the Holloway Commission, which investigated the mission to Iran, the Pentagon moved to institutionalize the counterterrorist forces, stationing Delta at Fort Bragg under the newly created Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC, pronounced "jay-sock") and setting up SEAL Team Six, stationed in Norfolk.

But as Air Force resistance to supplying transport demonstrated, those moves proved insufficient to protect the commandos from Pentagon turf wars. So in 1986, Congress took unprecedented steps to insulate the forces further by making three principal changes: it created a "unified command" (one that cuts across all four services) to coordinate all special operations forces, which include, for example, the Rangers and the Green Berets; it established an assistant secretary of defense for special operations and low-intensity conflict to support the unified commander; and it set up a coordinating board at the NSC to be composed of representatives from all the agencies, from the FBI to JSOC, that can help fight terrorism. Congress also recommended, but did not require, that the president appoint a deputy assistant for "low-intensity conflict," who would advise him on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency.

The armed services and the White House didn't exactly trip over each other rushing to comply. Reagan never appointed a deputy assistant. DOD stuck the new command in Tampa, Florida (from where, without a powerful lobby in the capital, it wouldn't be able to bother anyone at the Pentagon) and waited for more than a year to appoint key staff members. Using the time-honored divide-and-conquer strategy, it understaffed the office of the assistant secretary and put half his people in a building far from the Pentagon. Even then, DOD wasn't willing to take any chances; the first appointee to the new office had recommended against its creation. In the first year of its existence, the special advisory group to the assistant secretary committed only one recommendation to writing: that DOD should not implement the new legislation.

But since the unified commander of special operations now controls his budget, the forces are no longer captive to the spending priorities of the other services. The command can commission its own procurement projects, and the troops and their pilots are able to train together regularly. The new, unified command structure apparently is overcoming the interservice rivalries that dogged the Iran rescue attempt. That's the good news. The bad news is that the old inter*agency* roadblocks are as formidable as ever.

Divide and lose

The mechanisms that are supposed to guarantee that other agencies, like the CIA and the State Department, are cooperating with Defense have never worked well. Of all the changes mandated by Congress, the assistant secretary of defense for special operations and low-intensity conflict "is the key," says Maj. Gen. Richard Scholtes, former commander of JSOC. The assistant secretary is supposed to fight for support for all special operations forces, including for the assistance of other agencies, and to keep his eye on hot spots worldwide. Unlike his predecessors, James Locher, the new assistant secretary, strongly believes in the office he holds (in fact, as a staff member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, he wrote the legislation that created it). But the Pentagon's longstanding resistance to the office has left him at a serious disadvantage. "There is a mini-groundswell among those of us in the low-intensity-conflict-aware group that Mr. Locher has just disappeared off the radar screen in Washington," says a longtime special operations officer, now retired. "He doesn't have a job, he doesn't have an office." "There's not much expertise in those offices," says a former counterterrorist officer, "and they're moving too slowly." For his part, Locher maintains that he just needs more personnel and more time. "We're essentially taking the slow and steady approach here. Small staff, big bureaucracy."

If the NSC coordinating board were effective, then Locher's job would be a lot easier. Drawing on deputy secretaries from assorted agencies, the board would have the authority to shove foot-dragging departments into line. Bush has appointed a deputy as-

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sistant, but, beyond counterterrorism, he has also saddled him with some other area responsibilities, including "Africa, the United Nations, refugees, public diplomacy, the international affairs budget." Under Bush, unlike under Reagan, the NSC board has met—but only once.

For some of the agencies fighting the long-range war on terrorism, most notably the FBI, the existing level of coordination seems fine. Legislation in 1984 and 1986 expanded the mandate of the FBI to investigate terrorist acts against Americans abroad and to bring those responsible to justice. With some 20 warrants against terrorists worldwide, the bureau has made real progress. "If you look at the arrest of Hamadi in Germany, the arrest of Rasheed in Greece, the arrest of Younis off the coast of Cyprus . . . we have had a coordinated response to terrorist actions and activities against American citizens," says Oliver "Buck" Revell, associate deputy director of the FBI, naming some successes of his agency in the past few years. In a counterterrorist operation, the FBI comes in after the fact on its own initiative and, through slow and steady detective work in a stable environment, tracks down the criminals. Although that work is vital, it won't do much good if some nut in Manila suddenly claims to have placed an anthrax-dispersion bomb on the grounds of our naval base at Subic Bay.

As the U.S. government has come to rely more and more on the FBI to grapple with terrorists, it seems to have given up on the idea of a military option. Somehow, in conversations with people like Revell who deal with terrorism policy daily, the idea of using force has become an afterthought, pushed between parentheses. A failure of careful planning and intelligence support—that is, of vigorous leadership to coordinate planning and support—is what put it there. "There is a tremendous gap at the highest level—at the National Security Council level—of an integrated, interdepartmental unit that sets not just policy but planning directed against the terrorist threat," says a defense department official with many years' experience in special operations.

Why did it have to be Haiti? And how the heck did CNN get there so fast? Pascal-Trouillot has not only refused to allow Delta to operate there, she's refused to let the small, advisory Emergency Support Team land. And now the darn plane is being refueled again. The camera abruptly swings around to focus on two trucks and three jeeps that are driving across the tarmac toward the jet. "Oh no," mutters someone behind you. For the first time, with a profound sinking feeling, you realize how carefully planned this operation is. Sure enough, in plain view, 40 or 50 hostages are marched down one of those mobile staircases into the waiting trucks. As the trucks drive off, turn left at the airport gates, disappear, all you can do is watch. Two bodies are stretched out on the concrete at the bottom of the steps. Standing beside them, the lead terrorist is signaling for another press conference. Scowcroft is on the phone with Webster, trying to find out how good our human intelligence in Haiti is.

"Here guys!" calls out a commando, as he makes his way down the aisle of the liberated plane with a laden tray. "Budweisers!"

The military's troubles with getting reliable intelligence predate the formation of elite counterterrorist units. In 1970, intelligence reports that a large number of American POWs were being held in the Son Tay camp, about 20 miles north of Hanoi, sparked a massive, five-month planning effort, spearheaded by the Army: dozens of briefings, planning sessions, and studies, involving several thousand support staff. Finally, in November, the raid was launched from bases in Thailand. The mission was executed flawlessly. The Americans killed 25 of the enemy and withdrew without losing a man. But they withdrew without gaining any, either. The camp was empty—the POWs had all been moved, and no one in intelligence had noticed.

1 Big Mac, hold the mission

Five years later, when Cambodians captured the *Mayaguez* (an American container ship) and her crew, the military commanders again couldn't get the information they needed. After four days, Gerald Ford sent in the Marines, though he had no idea where the Americans were being held. While 18 soldiers were dying in an assault on the island near the anchored *Mayaguez*, the crew, having been released from a makeshift prison on the mainland, were re-

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turning unharmed to the ship. In all, 41 American soldiers died as a result of the mission. Sadly enough, one can draw an almost unbroken line from Son Tay to the *Mayaguez* incident to the Marine barracks bombing in Lebanon to the telephone conversation George Bush recently had with a crank caller claiming to be the president of Iran.

Judging by the major operations of the eighties, the problem is not only that American intelligence-gathering is poor; it's also that the military can't manage to tap into what intelligence exists. While American troops were stationed in Lebanon, the Pentagon ignored warnings from its own agents that, though good information on terrorists existed, no one was making sure it reached the Marines.

Poor intelligence hobbled the Grenada operation, which followed on the heels of the Marine barracks bombing. As Reagan himself said after the invasion, the American troops had "little intelligence information about conditions on the island." The operation's troubles can perhaps be chalked up to the haste with which it was planned. At the last minute the CIA's one source refused to return to the island. And no one, evidently, thought to call any of the numerous rich Americans who keep summer homes down there—or to ask some of the students' parents to call up their kids and ask them where they were staying. As a result, the invading troops didn't even know that the American medical students were scattered across Grenada. It took Delta—and the rest of the invasion force—two days to round them up.

The Panama invasion was planned over several months, so the architects had plenty of time to put the lessons learned on Grenada into play—if they had tried. Unfortunately, the Pentagon has a remarkable resistance to the conditioned response: No matter how many times it gets burned, it keeps making the same mistakes over and over again. Despite the debacle in Grenada, the CIA wasn't involved in planning Operation Just Cause, and the military forces had no way to tap CIA sources once they went in, contributing to their inability to find Noriega. Poor intelligence-gathering had other, more tragic effects as well. One SEAL team was assigned to disable planes at the Paitilla airfield. But as they approached the planes, the SEALs ran into unexpectedly heavy gunfire; four were killed and eight wounded. "Intelligence service to the SEALs was abysmal," says one man familiar with the operation. "They didn't know what the threat was." He pointed out that, given the enormous American presence in Panama, it wouldn't have been difficult to check out the airfield's defenses. "They could have asked a couple of the neighbors."

In contrast, the two major American counterterrorist successes of the 1980s, neither of which directly involved the Pentagon's counterterrorist forces, went off cleanly thanks to reliable intelligence-gathering. Although they had murdered an American, the hijackers of the *Achille Lauro* in 1985 were granted safe passage by Egypt, once they agreed to release their hostages. But, as Caspar Weinberger said at the time, "We had very good intelligence"—possibly thanks to Israel. In international airspace, American F–14s intercepted the airplane carrying the terrorists, forcing it to land at the U.S. Navy's Sigonella air base in Sicily. In 1987, in a more significant but less famous operation, three agencies and the Navy cooperated closely to bring Fawaz Younis, a Lebanese terrorist involved in at least two hijackings, to justice. The DEA found an informant who could get close to Younis; the CIA taped Younis bragging about his terrorist past; the FBI, which managed the operation, lured Younis from Cyprus into international waters and literally put the cuffs on him; and a Navy pilot carried him on a record flight through international airspace to the United States. Younis is now serving 30 years in maximum security.

That type of smooth coordination has eluded the special operations forces, largely because they haven't attempted it. "They don't know how to use the systems and the methods available to them," says a DOD source. "The military always wants to build units that are self-contained." JSOC now maintains a large computer database that stockpiles vital information on terrorists, airports, and American embassies around the world. But for intelligence gathering, Delta and SEAL Team Six are supposed to depend principally on the "Intelligence Support Activity," a secret unit within the Army that must seek CIA approval for its operations abroad. As Steven Emerson reported in his book *Secret Warriors,* the ISA has helped out other agencies and other governments—for example, it helped the Italian government locate U.S. General James Dozier, who was kidnapped by the Red Brigades in 1981.

The counterterrorist forces, however, tend not to use the ISA for long-range planning. "In Special Operations, the difficult missions are the ones that take a lot of time, a lot of planning," says a former member of ISA. But the ISA won't do that sort of brain work. "There's a lot more tendency to go with Direct Action—DA missions, the Rambo type missions. It's the McDonald's of Special Operations—instant gratification." It's partly that attitude, he says, which has turned rescuing hostages in Lebanon into a "mission impossible." Lebanon wasn't always that way, however. Directed through the NSC to come up with a rescue plan in the summer of 1986, ISA cultivated sources among the Christian militia, who supplied information that consistently checked out. By the fall,

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JSOC felt it had good enough intelligence and a sound enough plan to get at least three of the hostages out. But as the first agents were about to be deployed, the White House canceled the operation—apparently because a rescue attempt would have interfered with the arms-for-hostages negotiations being run out of the NSC (which were about to be exposed).

Look Ma—no hands!

Since 1986, no such long-range planning has been attempted. "The Pentagon routinely maintains and updates literally tons of plans and target folders against precise targets within the Soviet Union," Lt. Col. William Cowan, a retired ISA officer who still divides his time between Washington and Beirut, observed in a recent talk at the Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies. But, incredibly, no such plans—for retaliation or rescue—are kept to respond to terrorists. For example, when photographs of the hostage William R. Higgins, hanging, were distributed by terrorists to the media last summer, according to Cowan "There were no prepared contingency plans to deal with the instance of a hostage being killed." As a result, the most potent military force in the world could do nothing.

The blame for this failure can't rest just with the counterterrorist command; JSOC is able to focus on "McDonald's" operations because no one up the chain is leaning on them to conduct more involved planning (and leaning on agencies like the CIA to help out). Based on that planning, a high-level NSC "interdepartmental unit," says one DOD source, could "set out the intelligence gaps and then continue to monitor and coordinate the closing of those gaps." Instead, the CIA is making "a separate, general effort, not focused on a mission, to penetrate the infrastructure of the terrorist groups." In other words, they're doing their own thing, just as the unified command in Tampa is. That missing "interdepartmental unit" is, of course, supposed to exist—the NSC board Congress created four years ago that can't seem to find the time to meet.

Rather than insisting on better cooperation from the existing mechanisms, the unified commander is now lobbying to have responsibility for approving some counterterrorist intelligence operations moved to the Department of Defense. (Under existing rules, the director of the CIA has to sign off on every intelligence gathering mission abroad.) Anyone with drive who's worked in the Washington bureaucracy understands the temptation to reinvent the wheel rather than rely on the old agencies that seem long ago to have rusted over (even the Department of Energy has its own agents, gathering intelligence on terrorist threats to U.S. nuclear facilities). But the Pentagon, in creating the ISA, has already reinvented the wheel. The argument of the unified commander is now that by detaching that wheel from the car, we'll reach our goal more quickly. Even Cowan, who reportedly infuriated Dick Cheney by going to Beirut last winter as a private citizen, but with the knowledge of the unified commander and without Cheney's or the CIA's approval, doesn't support eliminating the coordinating mechanism. "I take no exception to that process. . . . Special operations can't be off doing whatever they want to do." The trick, he says, is to make the mechanism work faster. To get the car to its destination, the thing we really need is a driver.

Of butts and Buds

In 1985 terrorists hijacked TWA Flight 847 on its way to Rome from Athens. It was a sophisticated operation: To forestall an attack, the terrorists kept the plane shuttling between Beirut and Algiers and split off some of the hostages to be held inside Beirut proper. They killed one American, a Navy diver named Robert Stetham. The next year, Hollywood came along and offered its own revision of the tragedy, in a movie called *The Delta Force*, starring Lee Marvin (as the hard-boiled colonel) and Chuck Norris (as the laconic, butt-kicking major). It's a movie that can't help but pump up the Ronald Reagan in all of us: Delta's planes all work, their plans are foolproof, their dune buggies never break down, their rockets, launched from motorcycles, all blast their targets. The right piece of equipment, from collapsible ladders to wire cutters, is always at hand. (The one poignant bit of cinema verité: Israel's Mossad supplies the intelligence.) The hostages are divided in three groups in Beirut, but Delta gets 'em all. "They're our guys—they're Americans—they're *Delta Force*!" exults a hostage, on the cusp of rescue. Chuck, wordless, kicks the lead terrorist's butt, then blows him up with a motorcycle-launched rocket. "Here guys!" calls out a commando as he makes his way down the aisle of the liberated plane with a laden tray: "Budweisers!"

Ronald Reagan himself, ironically, had the unpleasant task of facing reality during the actual hijacking. The U.S. quietly gave in, asking the Israelis to release a large number of Shiite prisoners. When the hostages were freed, the president announced on television that "the United States gives terrorists no reward and no guarantees. We make no concessions. We make no deals." Tastes great—but, somehow, compared to the movie version, it's a lot less filling.

Today, something approximating the Hollywood ending to a counterterrorist mission, such as the Haiti

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scenario, seems a long way off. (Meanwhile, Hollywood has had a taste of reality. During the filming of *Delta Force II* last year, a helicopter crashed, killing five.) The Panama raid provides few good clues to Delta's capabilities, since it wasn't an operation that required the instant response and hair-trigger expertise of America's precision commandos. The planners had months to prepare the operation. Kurt Muse regularly had American visitors who could describe his surroundings, and his captors weren't standing over him waiting to shoot or to detonate a bomb.

Fear of trying

Obviously, the persistent lack of good interagency support doesn't bode well for a more off-the-shelf operation. But even the apparent success the command has had in overcoming interservice divisions by collecting all the military components of the counterterrorist forces under one roof has had its costs. In Israel, the vast majority of the top military officers (and many of the political leaders) have served with special operations. This high-level awareness of the needs and potential of the commandos has meant that the units most likely to be used to fight terrorists have never had to be insulated from the rest of the services to survive. As a result, when a unit is needed it can be called up, combined with support (aircraft, intelligence), and sent into action. In the U.S., Congress set the commandos apart and pumped money into them to protect them from the Pentagon, while the executive branch left them alone. This odd mix of attention and inattention has meant that as the unified command has settled into its new, more independent role, some of the bad bureaucratic habits of the conventional military have begun to creep into the unconventional forces.

Now that, in the words of one former member of the special operations command, special operations has become a "growth industry," it has attracted a cluster of one-, two-, and three-star generals. Under the supervision of the Unified Command (which boasts three generals), JSOC alone has two generals, controlling a relatively tiny force. More generals mean more money and more attention from the Pentagon. But most of the high-ranking officers in special operations are trained in conventional tactics, and aren't used to trying to think like terrorists.

There's a more subtle influence working against unconventional missions as well. "JSOC has become another one of those good places to go to get promoted out of," says the former officer. The promotions are important, because they serve to attract capable, ambitious young officers to the command. The problem, however, is that these officers are being moved up without having conducted or planned difficult missions. In a democracy, a great burden of counterterrorist operations is that, though they may yield a political windfall, they are extremely risky—a lesson that Jimmy Carter's experience carved into every politician's mind. A promotion process with no regard for missions attempted—or, more important, even planned—transfers that risk-aversion to the military leadership, leaving a system that's all checks and no balance.

The one clear American retaliatory attack against a terrorist power in the past decade—the bombing raid on Libya in 1986—was a case study in risk-aversion. Commandos sent in on the ground could have, like terrorists themselves, placed bombs beside precise targets. Instead, as David Martin and John Walcott reported in their book *Best Laid Plans*, a Pentagon "no-loss policy" dictated the entire mission, from the size of the force to the timing of the assault. The result was a virtual no-hit air attack: Many of the planes never dropped their bombs, and of those that did most missed their targets. Almost five tons of explosives landed in residential neighborhoods. And in the end, two American airmen were lost, anyway.

The combination of a growing bureaucracy and the tremendous fear of screwing up has encouraged JSOC to become, in the words of one expert, "so monstrous that from a security standpoint and an effectiveness standpoint it can't rise above its own weight." The Pentagon has concluded that the best time to strike terrorists is within 24 hours of the start of a hostage-taking; in a preemptive mission, the commandos would probably have to move even faster than that. But it usually takes Delta at least that long just to cross the Atlantic, if not to get off the ground. The United States seems incapable of quickly dispatching the small, flexible teams that could approach terrorists quietly in a "nonpermissive environment" (on hostile territory, as at Entebbe).

For example, consider the case of the hijacking of TWA Flight 847. JSOC took 24 hours to assemble the right equipment and get its commandos airborne. The force landed at Sigonella to wait for a chance to strike. Eventually, JSOC sent in six planeloads of equipment and about 400 people, including 50 support staff, to Sigonella and then to a British base on Cyprus. The press—and consequently the terrorists—didn't have much trouble catching on. During the *Achille Lauro* affair, JSOC once again sent a massive force to Sigonella, including a dozen transport planes and 500 men. "When we go to some place like Sigonella," said a retired officer, "we leave footprints that are so huge that it wouldn't take a genius in some control tower to figure out something was up." You might think that, given the number of

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times they've had to descend on that base and leave such "footprints," JSOC would just pitch camp there. In fact, the idea of "forward-deploying" commandos, so that they would be closer to their probable targets, has been discussed for years. After the hijacking of TWA 847, George Bush wisely recommended placing commandos overseas in his much-vaunted counterterrorism report for the president. But the U.S. government has never pushed friendly governments for the permission to do so.

Just say no to counterterrorism

As the bipolar world breaks up, probably the worst news about America's ability to deal with terrorism abroad is that the unified command and JSOC may be giving up on fighting terrorists altogether. Instead, like practically every other agency in the government, they want to start fighting drugs. Last fall, the command gained greater freedom when the 14-year-old ban on assassinations was narrowed, so that commandos who kill a drug trafficker in the process of trying to take him alive would now not be breaking the law. Drug missions are attractive, says a former counterterrorist officer, because they're faster and easier, and require less complicated planning; there's also a higher probability of action. But if the forces begin to focus on this role they "will wind up leaving the counterterrorism mission behind." Capturing drug lords is a very different operation than taking out terrorists. In fact, it's a mission that the commandos are poorly equipped to handle, since it requires more diplomatic finesse than lethal, irresistible force. Many of the drug lords live in friendly countries, surrounded by innocent people. The commandos train by pumping an average of 20,000 rounds of ammunition into rubber dummies each month. Dispatching them to grab a drug lord is a lot like . . . sending bombers after Qadaffi. The odds are pretty high for causing a lot of what is euphemistically called "collateral damage": killing the wrong folks.

The drug war, involving as it does many more agencies, is more poorly coordinated even than the war on terrorism. Already, Delta deployed once to a staging area in Puerto Rico in hopes of nabbing a narcotraficante—and blundered into an FBI–DEA operation to grab the same man, reportedly almost starting a firefight. Says the retired officer of the growing emphasis on chasing drug lords, "In the long run, somewhere, we're going to do something very stupid." And in the meantime, as terrorists strike against Americans—in South and Central America, in the Philippines, in India, in a thousand potential hot spots around the world—we're likely to keep doing nothing at all. □

The Washington Monthly

JOURNALISM AWARD

FOR MARCH 1990 IS PRESENTED TO

Jim Leusner and Christopher Quinn

The Orlando Sentinel

In their four-part report, Leusner and Quinn revealed what Orange County, Florida officials claimed to be completely unaware of: Martin Marietta, with the blessing of the Department of Defense, is storing an unspecified number of warheads, rocket motors, and missiles—possibly as much as 1.4 million pounds of weapons—in what it calls the "Remote Area," within 10 miles of Walt Disney World and downtown Orlando. When Martin Marietta first bought the land in 1956, the area was indeed remote. But over the years, the company has sold off land to encourage development, transferring to the buyers special development exemptions granted Martin Marietta, Florida's largest industrial employer, to produce what the reporters call "a blending of boomtown Orlando and high-technology armaments." Up to 500 armed Patriot missiles, for example, may be stored within half a mile of one retirement community of 5,000. This "blending" is unique in the United States. Leusner and Quinn make a strong case that Martin Marietta's precautions against fire and terrorists are flimsy. As one military officer commented to the authors, "Someone could pinpoint a storage facility and fire a grenade launcher from an expressway," touching off the armaments.

The Monthly Journalism Award is presented each month to the best newspaper, magazine, television, or radio story (or series of stories) on our political system. Nominations for any newspaper, magazine, or radio or television station in the country are welcome. The subject can be government in its federal, state, or municipal manifestation. Please send nominations to Monthly Journalism Award, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009. Two copies of the article or broadcast text should accompany the nomination.

The award for stories published or aired in April will be announced in the July/August issue. Nominations for stories published or aired in May and June will close July 15. The winner will be announced in the September issue.

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LET THEM EAT HONEY-ROASTED PEANUTS

If you thought the World Bank spent most of its energy fighting poverty in the Third World, think again

by Michael Irwin and members of the World Bank

On March 30, 1990, citing a bloated, overpaid bureaucracy, poor management, and pervasive arrogance, Michael Irwin resigned from his position as director of the World Bank's Health Services Department. A month before, Irwin had written the following letter to the bank's staff magazine. The memos written in response, excerpted here, give a small sampling of his reasons for quitting:

Letters section, *The Bank's World*, February 1990:

To the editor:

In February and March, I will be flying to four countries in East Africa. Although entitled to first class, I will travel in business class (and in economy when business is unavailable on some short flights in Africa). This will save about $1,900 on this trip, which will be used to send one of our nurses to the annual American Occupational Health Conference in Houston, Texas, in April.

Are there any important advantages in flying first class? I believe there are none. One can get enough to eat and drink (remember that two alcoholic drinks on a plane have the same effect as three on the ground!) in the business section of the plane. Some will claim they can sleep more easily on long flights when in first. However, to lessen the symptoms of jet lag, it is best to only take catnaps on long flights, as one should frequently drink nonalcoholic fluids to combat the excessive dryness inside the plane and also should walk occasionally around the cabin to lessen body fatigue and stimulate the circulation.

Consider how much money could be saved and used in more productive ways if most of us gave up first-class travel.

Michael Irwin, M.D., HSD

Date: February 9, 1990
To: Bilsel Alisbah [vice-president for personnel and administration, Irwin's boss]
From: Gottfried Ablasser, EM4AG [agricultural adviser in the World Bank's regional office for Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa]
Subject: First-Class Air Travel

. . . It is appalling that the director of the Bank's Health Services argues publicly for financial savings over staff members' health. He hasn't even made the trip to Africa referred to in his letter yet, and he is already boasting about his (imaginary) money-saving discovery! Mr. Irwin must either be terribly ill-informed or frighteningly insensitive to staff members' concerns.

My family and I will not feel safe again until Mr. Irwin has been replaced by someone who really cares. I, and I am sure many of my colleagues, will be watching what steps you and the Staff Association are going to take towards this end.

Michael Irwin worked at the UN for 32 years. Currently, he is semi-retired and working on a novel.

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Date: February 9, 1990
To: Dr. Michael Irwin, PERHS
From: Grant Sinclair, AS1PH [adviser in the Population and Human Resources Division of the Bank's Regional Office for Asia]
Subject: Your letter in *The Bank's World*

1) From the perspective of a frequent traveler in Operations, your choice of subject material for a letter to *The Bank's World* was indeed an unfortunate one, and I can only wonder as to your reasons for choosing this particular forum to use your position to make the chilling statement that you did against first class travel. I would also wonder where are the benefits to staff health from your spending a considerable sum of money on a four-country trip to East Africa (even in business class). Could I suggest that this money might be much better spent on, for example, monitoring noise and air quality in Bank buildings during the reconstruction process and on seeking ways to reduce the stress factors inherent in our work here, instead of potentially adding greatly to them.

2) Your assertion that travel money could be more productively used completely overlooks the reality of the budget process in this institution. . . . Our financial controllers would simply accept a one-time reduction in the cost of doing business, then go about the wholly arbitrary process of keeping the lid on expenditures, but from a lower level. What would you then have achieved? Probably nothing but a lot of dissatisfaction among the *productive* staff of this institution and, I might predict, some time later a modest increase in the numbers of post-mission, travel-induced strokes among our more elderly frequent travelers, which, of course, would help to justify the continued existence of a World Bank Health Office that is of dubious value to many of us in the first place.

Date: February 9, 1990
To: Michael Irwin
From: Robert Calderisi, EAASV [principal adviser to Mr. Alisbah]
Subject: First Class Travel

. . . In case you haven't heard yet, your letter to the editor in this week's *The Bank's World* is causing a large stir among operational staff. The apparent gratuitousness of the advice and the implied criticism of anyone who continues to fly first class are apparently at the heart of the trouble.

I have been a skeptic myself on the issue in the past . . . but the matter is an extremely sensitive one still, partly because for operational staff it is the most tangible expression (and some would say the "final test") of the institution's esteem and consideration. . . .

Add to this the recurrent budget battles in the Board and the difficulty which the President has had in preserving first-class travel for staff, and the brew becomes all the more heady. Your letter will be seen as a gift to the "bean counters" in the Bank and the US/UK "budget bashers" on the Board, despite the good advice you also provided on how to reduce the effects of jet-lag—which I enjoyed.

You couldn't have known this background, but you can expect to hear from the Staff Association or irate readers. While in Nairobi, you might want to draft a suitably witty retraction for a future issue. Shall I try to draft a limerick for you?

Bon voyage!

February 16, 1990

Mr. Alisbah,

I don't know what your personal view on [our] travel policy is, but it seems *quite inappropriate* for a senior manager to publish his personal views in a letter to the editor. Particularly since he runs the department on which we have relied for part of our argumentation.

Ernie
[Ernest Stern, Senior Vice President, Finance]

Excerpt from the minutes of the Executive Board's Committee on Cost Effectiveness and Budget Practice, January 1988, that were enclosed with the above note:

Discussion of Bank's Travel Policy—Operational and Health Considerations.

. . . The staff stated that one of the best ways to ease the stress of travel was to travel by the means which provided travelers with the most restful and the least stressful accommodations possible. The Medical Department staff said that first-class offered more space per passenger, larger and more comfortable seats, greater peace and quiet, and better toilet facilities. . . .

Personal

March 21, 1990

Dear Mr. Stern,

. . . Please forgive me for being so frank, but I would like to make the following comments:

. . . Regarding the "minute" you sent to Mr. Alisbah, I certainly do not feel at all committed to some

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of the rather silly remarks which were made to justify first-class travel to the Board committee in 1988.

. . . Personally, I believe first class air travel, instead of "business class" travel, should be discouraged for medical reasons . . . and for nonmedical reasons (e.g., creating an inappropriate image to others; a waste of money). In other "UN family" organizations, except for the IMF, only the most senior officials now usually travel in first class—why should the Bank be so very different?

Yours sincerely,
Michael Irwin

Date: February 16, 1990
To: Michael Irwin, PERHS
From: Paul M. Cadario, AS3CO [chairman, Staff Association Working Group on Travel and Services]
Subject: Staff Association reply to your letter to *The Bank's World*.

. . . I understand that your views about the desirability of flying in business class are your own, and do not reflect the opinions of others in the Personnel and Administration Complex. It is all the more unfortunate that your letter has created, once again, widespread anxiety among traveling Bank staff about possible changes in the Bank's travel policy. This policy has served the institution well for many years. . . .

For over a decade there have been various challenges to the Bank's travel policy. These have come from management, from a narrow group on the Board, from the authors of the Reorganization, and from the Bank's budget authorities. For over a decade, every report prepared in response has demonstrated that the current policy suits the Bank's operational requirements well. . . .

Moreover, there is increasing medical evidence about the health hazards of air travel (aside from over-indulgence in first class, which you are wise to remind us of) and how the seating space in the forward cabin reduces these dangers somewhat. . . . These misunderstandings are particularly unfortunate and damaging to morale in the reorganized Bank, now that an increasing number of technical department staff are traveling more than 150 days per year. . . .

It is regrettable that the tightness of HSD's training budget forced you to travel below the class that has been shown to be most effective for the Bank's requirements. Perhaps when you return from your trip to East Africa, you will understand better why those of us who travel often do not share your views.

Date: March 13, 1990
To: Mr. Paul M. Cadario
From: Michael Irwin, M.D.
Subject: First Class Travel

. . . I am pleased to tell you that I had a pleasant trip—except for one "leg." When I was in Lusaka, the local office arranged for me to fly direct to Dar-es-Salaam and, by mistake, gave me a first class ticket. On this Air Tanzania flight, I quickly discovered that five of the eight occupants of the 12 seats in first class were all smokers. After half an hour of this exposure, I moved back to the designated areas for nonsmokers in the economy section of the plane—there being no "business class"—where I enjoyed the rest of my flight.

In your memorandum you mentioned that "an increasing number of technical department staff are travelling more than 150 days per year." From information I received earlier this year, it seems to me that only 18 staff travelled more than 150 days during calendar year 1989, and this is a reduction on the previous year. Maybe my information is wrong—if so, I would be pleased to be corrected. . .

From World Bank Group Staff Association Newsletter, February 28, 1990:

TRAVEL POLICY—The Staff Association has noted the concern voiced by staff regarding Dr. Irwin's statements in *The Bank's World* on First Class travel. We have confirmed that this is Dr. Irwin's personal view and does not reflect a change in Bank policy on this issue.

Letters section, *The Bank's World*, March 1990:

To the editor:

The merits of the World Bank operational travel policy have been extensively debated and found valid. Staff with control of their travel budgets, from stack managers to the president, have independently made the judgment that, for various reasons, first-class travel is generally desirable for their missions. If a major objective of this organization is to save money, two possibilities are not to travel at all or to close some departments—options Dr. Irwin may want to consider in the case of HSD.

Malcolm Bale, LA1

To the editor:

I was extremely pleased to read Dr. Irwin's letter. I agree with Dr. Irwin that lots of money could be saved and used in more productive ways if we gave up first-class travel. However, we shouldn't stop at that.

Take elevators for example. Think of how much

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money the Bank could save by stopping the elevators altogether. This would also respond to Dr. Irwin's concern with staff health; it would have salutary effects as we would all be energetically using the stairs. But this is not all. Take the offices. Do we really need such large offices? I'm sure that most of us could fit in offices half their current size, if not less. But this is just the beginning. Think of our salaries. I am sure we could reduce them by 10 percent at least without any effect on our living standards. Also, think of the Bank furniture, such as expensive chairs (what's wrong with stools?), the unnecessary carpets, windows, etc.

In two or three years, of course, this place will be full of people who have no sense of what feeling well means and no expertise in ensuring their own well-being. How such people could be productive and contribute to improve the well-being of others is hard to imagine. Never mind. They would come cheap and virtuous. Once virtuous, why bother being rational or productive?

Roberto Zagha, AS1CO

Date: March 15, 1990
To: Mr. Roberto Zagha, AS1CO
From: Michael Irwin, M.D. PERHS
Subject: Your letter in the March issue of *The Bank's World*

. . . I am a great believer in using stairs as opposed to elevators, especially if one is moving downwards. . . .

Regarding the size of the individual offices, I believe that some in the Bank's buildings may be unusually large. The present one I occupy is at least one-third larger than the one I had in New York when I was the Medical Director at the United Nations. . . .

Regarding salaries, you may be interested in knowing that, generally, salaries of Bank staff are about 20 percent higher than those of our UN colleagues in New York and, of course, one should add that New York is generally a more expensive area than Washington.

In spite of these handicaps, which my former UN, UNICEF, and UNDP colleagues faced, I do not think that their performances are any different from those I see among my present colleagues in the Bank.

Date: March 14, 1990
To: Michael Irwin
From: Thierry Sagnier, EXTMC [editor of *The Bank's World*]
Subject: Your memo to Paul Cadario

. . . I have been associated with *The Bank's World* since its creation in 1981 and do not recall ever running a story prompting so many angry responses. My in-box, All-in-1, and doorway were jammed with missives and staff denouncing me for having run the letter. The issue is obviously a highly sensitive one, with staff concerned that management will take away what they deem is not so much a luxury as a necessity. Even though the opinion you stated was your own and not management's, I fear we ruffled the feathers of many at all levels. I'm therefore somewhat reluctant to pursue the issue.

I would, however, be very interested in getting an article from you on how to avoid jet lag. Would this be possible?

March 30, 1990

An Open Letter to the President of the World Bank

Dear Mr. Conable,

. . . The present administrative budget, for the fiscal year 1989-90, of $900 million (for a staff of about 7,000) could rise to $1 billion in the next fiscal year. . . . In the coming year, as forecast in a January document to the President's Council, "substantial increases are likely to arise out of changes in personnel benefits policies." . . . Also, there is expected to be "a salary budget increment of 6 percent . . . compared to a general U.S. inflation rate projected at about 4.5 percent." All these new financial advantages to staff will occur even when the same paper refers to the fact that, in some areas of development, the "Bank Group response tends to be constrained less by inadequate numbers of staff than by difficulties in coordination with the Bank Group and by the training, orientation, and attitudes of Bank staff." . . .

Some of the Bank's projects are successful, some may help a little, some are failures, and some are actually harmful. The same can be said of the Bank's staff and its internal practices. With the organization being overconcerned with its prestige, and the staff being preoccupied with their salaries, benefits, and "grade creep," is it possible that today the Bank has forgotten why it exists? . . . Is it not very hypocritical to prescribe financial discipline and savings for so many developing countries without being more restrictive within one's own organization? . . .

Yours sincerely,
Michael Irwin

Postscript: The Economist *reports that "in March, the World Bank reached an agreement with British Airways that provides Bank staff with a 'free upgrade to Concorde for first-class travel to/from Washington, subject to availability within 96 hours of departure.'"* □

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How to Cut the Bureaucracy in Half

Understanding Slot Syndrome, Headless Nails, Meeting Mania, and other government gimmicks

by Scott Shuger

In the summer of 1940, in order to accommodate the many new military agencies then cropping up in Washington, Franklin Roosevelt authorized the construction of office buildings all along the city's Mall. Roosevelt had wanted the buildings, which quickly became known as "tempos," to be so poorly made that they couldn't last more than 10 years. But the tempos became a perfect symbol of self-sustaining government bloat: Many of them were still standing and full of government workers 20 years after much of the need for them had vanished.

As FDR developed one alphabet-soup agency after another in response to first the Depression and then World War II, the federal government grew from its 1932 level of about 500,000 civilian employees to 1.1 million in 1940 and 3.5 million by V-J Day. Today, with no catastrophes of equivalent dimension confronting us, it's still nearly as large—3.1 million employees. Ronald Reagan won office by running against Washington; his promises to cut back the federal government included plans to eliminate whole cabinet departments. But the spirit of the tempos reigned instead: During his two terms, the number of government workers increased 7.5 percent.

Scott Shuger is an editor of The Washington Monthly. *Research assistance was provided by Daniel Kaufman and George C. Taylor.*

Analysts of corporate performance know that the companies that came through the eighties best had learned to be leaner. For instance, over the past 14 years, Conrail has cut its workforce by 61 percent—and has gained market share in the process. Here are some other examples from a recent book by Rosabeth Moss Kanter, the editor of the *Harvard Business Review*:

➤Beaten by Xerox in copiers and suddenly threatened by Japanese camera and film companies, Eastman Kodak eliminated 24,000 jobs between 1983 and 1986—a reduction of 17.5 percent—and closed its central film-processing facility. This allowed the company to reorganize, giving managers much more direct responsibility, which in turn promoted diversification and the farming out of marginally profitable work.

➤In leading Apple Computer back from the failure of its much ballyhooed Lisa computer and its first quarterly loss as a public company, CEO John Sculley consolidated the company's operating divisions, closed plants, and laid off one-fifth of its employees.

➤Before Shenandoah Life Insurance combined the operations of several divisions, a particular form was being routed to 32 people, across nine sections and three departments. Afterwards, the task was han-

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dled by a team of six people who did 13 percent more work, with greater speed, fewer errors, and 80 percent less supervision.

Why can't government learn these lessons too?

And you don't need to appoint yet another Hoover Commission or Grace Commission or Volcker Commission to learn them. Instead, behold the GS-13s and GS-14s, the federal common man. In a graded pay structure that begins with GS-1 and ends with the Senior Executive Service, these 200,000 workers are the middle of the government's middle. (There are additional middle-level employees not included in this figure, such as those at the Postal Service and the intelligence agencies.) A GS-13 makes up to $55,000 a year and a GS-14 up to $65,000. GS-13 is the last stage of federal employment for those who don't have supervisory responsibilities; GS-14 is the first stage for those who do. These are the highest levels most government workers attain. Their military counterparts are the 0-4s and 0-5s, the majors (in the Navy and Coast Guard, lieutenant commanders) and lieutenant colonels (commanders). These in-the-trench bureaucrats already know what the symptoms of government's fatal overstaffings are—and most of those symptoms suggest their own cures.

"The civil service is a unique and talented mix of people with diverse skills and abilities that can't be found anywhere else in the world," George Bush said recently. "And their hard work is not only seen in Washington, but in communities across the country." That's certainly true of many federal employees, but some of those well below Bush in his overstaffed government put it differently. A former GSA employee tells me how her bureau chief made a habit of taking most of the hour before lunch every day to read aloud to his staff from the *National Enquirer*. And a young Department of Justice attorney complains that the most intense interest in his office seems to be directed towards something called the Porky Preakness, a weight-losing contest. "Half my employment in the past year—no, probably 90 percent— has been useless," admits Sid Finn*, a 10-year veteran of Health and Human Services, who was also at the agency's predecessor, HEW, before that. Finn describes the office he works in as a good example of the idea that "the more inspectors you have, the more mistakes you have. . . . The office says to Congress that we could do better if you give us more people. But ever since I've been there, I've been aware that we're understaffed in the regions and incredibly overstaffed in Washington." A GS-14 auditor with 23 years experience at the General Accounting Office sums up this different view for me: "If you're results-oriented, the government's not the place to be."

*All the people are real. None of the names are.

Such bureaucratic self-criticism is rare, however. Bush's view prevails—and with it, bureaucratic bloat—in part because of a simple fact of human nature: People don't like to admit that they're wasting their lives. The GS-14s know what the problems are, but you have to ask the right questions to hear about them. If a government employee has the remotest chance of presenting his job to the wider world as meaningful, even inspirational, that's what he'll do.

For instance, if you met me at a party I probably wouldn't be terribly reticent about my past service as a naval intelligence officer. And it wouldn't take too much additional cajoling to get me to embark on a story or two about some of the important and exciting things I did in that capacity. But as long as you were unarmed, I would never tell you about The World's Greatest Code Book.

Military Scrabble

Once during a seagoing exercise I participated in, our admiral expressed displeasure about what he correctly viewed as his aviators' poor radio security. It's really not that difficult to make improvements in this area: a few additional radio-code procedures will do the trick. But when the airwing commander heard the admiral's comments, he took the whole thing as a personal affront. *He*'d show that deskbound two-star a thing or two! So instead of merely doing the tactically correct thing, he decided to put together a dictionary of code words so immense, so exhaustive, that it would cover any possible radio message that the admiral or anyone on his staff would ever want to have pilots encode. And not only did this guy want the dictionary assembled immediately, he wanted it assembled in complete *secrecy*. He was planning for the delicious moment when his boss would ask him why his fighter pilots on station couldn't say X in a tactically safe manner, and he'd be able to produce this mammoth document and coolly reply, "Ah yes, admiral, that would be on page 1,007. The pilots already have them."

Now once such a brilliant scheme is conceived there is the little matter of execution. Who would actually assemble the WGCB? From the first rumor of the plan, every junior intelligence officer onboard the carrier knew the answer to that one. "I'll do it," said my boss. Which all the junior intelligence officers knew freely translated as "*We*'ll do it."

So it was that the 10 or so of us were called together to "get cracking." As my boss explained it, the job broke down into two manageable tasks: a) identifying everything that you could ever want to say from an airplane, and b) making up a code word for it. Then he left, saying that he expected the results in

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two days. There we were—captive participants in the world's first Military Scrabble tournament. The perfect chord for the program was struck when one of my coworkers suggested that the first message we needed to encode was "My radio is broken."

For the next few days, in between our normal duties, we worked feverishly on the project. Just before the deadline, we produced a huge list. At this point it was clear that what we'd done was tactically useless, if for no other reason than if this dictionary were ever put on the actual "kneeboard cards" that pilots use, it would weigh 30 pounds. No doubt the Russians would have approved. In a matter of days, on just a few typewriters, we had developed a weapon that could herniate every aviator in the Seventh Fleet.

Nevertheless, my boss was beaming when he handed the list in. No junior intelligence officer was surprised that it was never heard of again.

Spills and floods

This debacle has a number of important morals. When my airwing was confronted by a legitimate worry, its irrelevant response used up as much effort and morale as the right one would have (probably more). So it's not accidental that cockpit radio procedures didn't improve for several more months. And if there had been only, say, two or three junior intelligence officers attached to the airwing instead of 10, this nuthatch project couldn't have been mounted instantly on such a grand scale; it would have been small and slow and hence probably would have passed out of existence before it ended up consuming anywhere near as much effort as it actually did. Here's the punchline: When a bureaucracy is screwed up, it does not automatically mean that all or most of the bureaucrats are lazy or stupid—we worked like dogs and with considerable ingenuity on that code book—and a modern organization can usually do more real work quicker with fewer people and fewer tasks.

I say *usually* because a big enemy of efficiency is the blanket generalization. The Department of Commerce does not need more people (although it probably needs some *different* people). But the Coast Guard could use some more—at least in the field. According to a PBS "Frontline" documentary, the *Exxon Valdez* proceeded unnoticed towards its fateful grounding on Bligh Reef because the responsible Coast Guard station had, in a manpower crunch, eliminated round-the-clock radar supervision and manual plotting of ships' courses. And the government is falling behind in its attempt to make cases and recover funds in billions of dollars worth of S&L frauds because of a dearth of FBI agents. *Time* reports that the FBI recently sought funds for 425 additional agents to investigate bank scams but received only enough for fewer than half that many. Of the 3,500 major criminal S&L cases pending, 1,500 are inactive, due to such manpower shortages. It's a similar story at the IRS. With delinquent taxes now estimated to be approaching $100 billion, it would certainly make sense to hire more examiners and auditors.

This failure to get specific about jobs is what's wrong with the IRS's and the Defense Department's current hiring freezes. With a hiring freeze, jobs are eliminated by attrition. But attrition is a random process—people do not quit or retire according to some intelligent overall plan. Freezes do not distinguish between Jones with his feet up on his desk and Smith with his finger in the dike. If Smith quits or retires before Jones does, you don't get improved efficiency—you get a flood. Reductions in force (RIFs) are no better, because they operate by the principle of seniority; if Smith doesn't have enough time in service to make the cut, there's still going to be a disaster. Freezes and RIFs assume from on high that every office has similar manning needs and that within each office, each job is equally needed and equally well performed. But to find dead wood, you can't rely on satellite photos; you have to walk through the forest.

Gang of five

When I recently took that walk—when I asked bureaucrats about the causes and effects of the fat in their offices—I learned that there are five main problems.

The Slot Syndrome. FDR's tempos are the paradigm of this one. If an organization is confronted with a need, it must respond by creating jobs that meet that need. But if the need goes away, whether because the jobs are performed well or because of other factors, it's just as important that those jobs go away too. But in government this hardly ever happens—bureaucratic slots, once created, tend to take on lives of their own. If the world ebbs and flows while bureaucracies stay put, the slot syndrome is the reason why.

Derek Rodgers, a GS-14 at the Commerce Department with 24 years' government service, gives me a clear example: "The payroll in my office is about $600,000," he says. "It had some things to do years ago—there were special projects all over the world. But there's no big money to fuel those anymore and yet the bureaucratic entity that was to promote this still exists."

According to Jane Gustafson, an attorney who

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worked in one of HUD's regional offices for over 10 years, HUD's inefficiency is certainly not confined to the scandal at headquarters. Gustafson says that from 1976 to 1982, she was pretty busy with legal work, reviewing contracts, doing closings, and the like. But even then, she recalls urban renewal specialists being added to the office when there was virtually no urban renewal going on. Later, when the big Reagan housing cuts began to take effect, Gustafson's office still didn't scale back. "After that, there was less and less work to do and I had more time on my hands," she remembers. "There was very little professional challenge for me."

Although Daniel Stein was convicted of attempted extortion two years ago, he's still employed at the State Department. As a convicted felon, he can't vote, but he can pull down a GS-14's salary and, someday, a GS-14's pension too.

That leads to one of the most damaging effects of the slot syndrome—goldbricking. Much of the inner office life of today's bureaucrats could come from the pages of the late-forties play *Two Blind Mice*, which is set in the "Office of Seeds and Standards," a department with so little to do that it had been abolished five years before—but persisted because it had never been notified.

The official HUD description of Gustafson's job states that her duties were "to handle litigation for which the office of regional counsel has lead responsibility as well as litigation for which the general counsel's office claims lead responsibility." That meant that she was supposed to "prepare all necessary legal documentation and do all things necessary to competently and professionally represent the department and/or support the general counsel's office." Gustafson is a very bright person who would have eagerly undertaken such a formidable assignment had it been offered to her. But what did she actually wind up doing?

"By the end, I was really fudging my time." Suddenly Gustafson breaks into laughter as she blows a professional secret: "In the bottom drawer of one of the file cabinets, the secretaries had a lot of trash novels; in the last two years, I got a lot of reading done in the office. A *lot*."

"We have enormous numbers of people who don't do anything," says Sid Finn of HHS. "And I mean *anything*. One sells real estate. I spend an enormous amount of time on my volunteer work. There's a tremendous amount of socializing. People fall into each other's arms every day as though they had not seen each other for a year, catching up on what they had for dinner the night before. It's very social."

"In every major defense plant you have three, four, five officers, usually colonels," explains George Tracy, who worked as a Defense Department auditor for 26 years. "They give them that assignment three to six years before they retire and that's when they make the contacts with these people they end up going to work for. They receive the reports of the technical people who work for them, but they're not expert in any of the areas. And they 'liaison' with the contractors by going to lunch with them. There's very little they do that's productive. I'd say they contribute virtually nothing to the performance of the procurement function. They screw off. They've got their Wednesday afternoon golf and their long weekends."

Derek Rodgers tells me about coworkers selling real estate or computer software from their office desks. "There was one guy who finally got his income in real estate up to the point where he said, 'I don't need this anymore.'" So he decided to retire. "And to do that he ran another scam: He used to dress like an absolute slob in the office. He walked around the office without his shoes. He looked terrible. He carried this charade on for two years just to get what they call a discontinued service retirement." As a result, at age 50, the man got out with 90 percent of a full pension. "The day he retired he had on a neatly pressed suit, his hair was all slicked back. He looked great.

"Today most people in the international trade administration don't have a full day's work," Rodgers continues, readily counting himself in that category. (Nevertheless, his official job description runs five single-spaced typed pages.) He says that out of 1,500 workers, only 100 are "notable exceptions" to that characterization. "We have GS-14s and GS-15s running around without jobs. We're talking about people that make $60,000 and $70,000 a year."

Supervisors who have slots added to their domain find themselves with additional subordinates and a weightier payroll. And since supervisors are conditioned to feel a greater glory anytime such augmentation occurs, they aren't going to take any steps to

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undo it. "Your pay and your position all depend on the number of people that you supervise and the size of your budget," explains Rodgers. "That's the battle in Washington."

The assignment of intelligence officers to *every* squadron in a carrier airwing is a perfect example of the slot syndrome. Every squadron skipper enjoys having his own intelligence officer, even though only a handful of the wing's squadrons really need them or, indeed, ever find anything productive for them to do. In other words, the slot syndrome was the reason I found myself sitting around a table with nine other earnest young intelligence officers trying to think of a cryptic way to say, "My foot's asleep"—instead of oh, say, collecting intelligence.

The solution to the syndrome isn't all that complicated. The problem exists only if the number of people you command and the amount of money you control are allowed to be more important than *what you accomplish*. If organizations are forced to articulate clear goals with a reward/punishment structure to match, there won't be much prestige or advancement in diddling around, no matter how many people are doing your diddling for you. (Sure enough, the Navy's fondness for the slot syndrome is borne out by its confused reward structure. The captain of the *Vincennes* and his weapons officer were recently awarded medals for the period of service that included their shoot-down of a civilian airliner.)

Grade Creep. In 1955, 8.2 percent of those in the federal civilian workforce were in grades GS-12 through GS-15, the middle levels of government. In 1975, that figure was 23.2 percent. The latest available figures indicate that it is now 28.9 percent. In 1955, 2.9 percent of all military personnel were officers at the O-4 and O-5 level. In 1975, that figure was 4 percent, and it remains 4 percent today. This progression toward the middle is grade creep; it's primarily caused by an advancement scheme that's too generous until you hit the top of the middle ranks, and it's behind a lot of the trouble. When I ask Derek Rodgers of Commerce if government is getting more cumbersome, he grabs the legal pad out of my hand and starts drawing charts. In no time, he's drawn me

The Persian Slot

By Daniel Kaufman

It's not just jobs that suffer from the slot syndrome—entire organizations and policies can too. A good example is the current U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf. The Navy stepped up its Gulf operations in the early eighties in response to two perceived threats: the Soviet presence in Afghanistan and the Iran-Iraq war. Neither of these threats exist today. Our insistence on keeping forces in the now-quiet Gulf brings to mind an old joke: A salesman knocks, a woman answers. "Would you like to buy some elephant repellent?" he asks.

"There are no elephants around here."

"See how well it works?"

Actually the United States has had military forces in the Gulf since 1949. Whenever the Gulf mission is questioned, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM—the Defense Department's umbrella military agency in the region) responds first with this fact, as if that in itself were justification. Underlying the slot syndrome is the belief that, "If it were wrong, it could not have gone on this long." The current mission in the Persian Gulf is an example of just how mistaken that belief can be.

For most of the sixties and seventies, our presence in the Gulf consisted of one command ship and two destroyers. In the eighties, our forces expanded gradually until July of '87 when we began to re-flag and escort 11 Kuwaiti oil tankers. At the height of that involvement, we had 29 ships in the Persian Gulf. In the eighties, the Pentagon's primary stated fear was that the Soviets might expand into any vacuum created by a U.S. withdrawal. Now, the Defense Department admits this scenario is no longer "credible."

So it's not surprising that the mission's traditional secondary justification—oil—has now become its first. General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, CENTCOM's commander, points out that 77 percent of the world's oil reserves lie in the Persian Gulf region and says that we must guarantee "freedom of navigation in this vital international waterway." But as any number of columnists and congressmen have pointed out, the United States imports only 12 percent of its oil from the Gulf, compared with 29 percent for Western Europe and 63 percent for Japan, neither of which are maintaining any military presence in the region. Schwarzkopf's reasoning fails to consider

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a couple of interesting pictures of his agency—a series of boxes and arrows that get more and more baroque. "In the early Carter years, international trade administration"—where Rodgers works—"was headed up by one assistant secretary. He reported to the undersecretary. At the time, the undersecretary was the number two man in the department. That assistant secretary had in the next line under him, four deputy assistant secretaries. And under those four deputy assistant secretaries there were the various office directors. That's not the case today," continues Rodgers, now on page two. "Under Carter, we got 13 deputy assistant secretaries in international trade administration. And under Reagan, we got 26. That's quite an expansion." The pad in front of us now looks like hell.

The chief consequence of this gross expansion at the middle is that there are too many layers to traverse to get anything done. Dividing up into more empires doesn't produce more trade; it just produces more emperors. Rodgers recalls that under the old scheme, office directors supervised hundreds of employees and controlled millions in resources. By contrast, Rodgers's office director today has only 15 employees. However, there is one thing that has gotten much larger—the office director's salary.

Grade creep is a sign of, as well as a cause of, the slot syndrome: most vestigial slots are filled by employees in the middle grades, and an increase in the number of such employees fuels a need to find fancier-seeming slots to put them in, a need not tied to real-world demands.

Not only that, but grade creep actually pushes government away from the problems it should be solving. The higher end of the middle job grades is dominated by policy-making and policy-evaluating slots while the lower end bears the burden of most of the policy-*implementing* and policy-*enforcing* jobs. It's in these line positions that you'll find most of the overworked government employees, and their plight is considerably aggravated because they serve so many underworked people in staff positions. "As a street agent you don't have as much autonomy as people think," Len Cartwright, an FBI agent for 19 years, explains. "Say you're working a major criminal case, and they give you a background investiga-

that no one has a greater incentive to keep the oil flowing than the Gulf nations themselves. If they can't move their oil, then they've lost their chief source of income. That income is substantial, which means that these countries can afford to expand their navies if they think they need greater security.

At present, we have seven ships and about 2,800 troops in the Gulf. Kuwait has five re-flagged tankers there that we no longer "escort," but now "monitor." How much does it all cost? No one knows, and what's worse, Congress hasn't bothered to ask. The Defense Department is keeping mum, with the excuse that funds aren't apportioned by theater, but it's possible to make a good guess. Ex-Secretary of the Navy John Lehman estimates the direct cost of our Persian Gulf operations at about $50 million annually. But one of the trademarks of the slot syndrome is hidden costs. Lehman points out that $50 million is an unrealistically low number because you must also take into account the substantial backup operations, such as support groups in the surrounding area, the CENTCOM headquarters in Florida, and the five U.S.-based military divisions earmarked for the Persian Gulf. The number of troops involved then rises above 90,000 and the annual price tag leaps to nearly $40 *billion*. Now clearly not all those billions are spent on the Gulf presence specifically, but some of them are.

And for what? If you're looking for an explanation, think elephants again: The Gulf has not seen one antishipping attack since the cease-fire nearly two years ago. On the other hand, if the goal of our stepped-up presence was to deter attacks on shipping, then it was an utter failure. As a Defense Department memo puts it, "Attacks against shipping in the latter part of 1987 and the first part of 1988"—when our force levels were highest—"marked the most intensive anti-shipping operations by Iran during the war."

The Navy, faced with impending budget cuts, has recently identified 94 bases and facilities that it will consider for possible shutdown. And Secretary of Defense Cheney has presented a cutback list of his own. It's a testimony to the strength of the slot syndrome that the Persian Gulf mission isn't on either one. □

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tion"—a routine check into a federal job applicant's history—"the case gets put off until you get that done. That happens constantly. There's just tons of paperwork. For example, they need surveys, they need this, they need that. You have to stop everything you're doing in the field to furnish survey data about how much time you're spending on this particular case."

At HUD, Jane Gustafson's boss became obsessed with developing work plans—individual work plans, the regional counsel's work plan, and the regional office's work plan. The only problem was that none of this was coordinated with Washington's plans, which were the only ones that mattered. But that didn't stop the planning from becoming a major project. Gustafson estimates that although in the seventies, the office spent only 5 percent of its time on such internal matters, by the end of her tenure there, it spent 40 percent. While she was sitting in an office slaving away at her boss's nonsensical work plans, nobody was in the field to catch Marilyn Harrell skimming millions.

Again, if government organizations would get clear on what they are supposed to be doing—catching crooks, providing low-cost housing—and adopt a reward structure that reflects that, this trend could be reversed. Most of the government jobs that should be eliminated are top-of-the-middle staff slots; most of the jobs that should be added are middle-of-the-middle line slots. Under grade creep, government has become a football team with too many quarterbacks and not enough interior linemen. Teams like that don't win.

Headless Nails. One retired military officer I spoke with gave a succinct answer when I asked him why businesses don't seem to have as much goldbricking as the government: "Simple. Businesses can fire people." As the saying goes, government workers are like headless nails—you can get them in, but you can't get them out. Many government offices are saddled with employees in their seventies who can't really cut the mustard anymore but who possess the virtual lifetime tenure that came in 1978 with the abolition of mandatory federal retirement. The old mandatory rule came about because most supervisors were uncomfortable with going up to old Joe and telling him he was no longer doing adequate work. But now, without that rule, courage to say that kind of thing is even more important. The absence of it has fostered the belief that government employees have an inherent "right" to their jobs.

Government workers who are totally incompetent or worse seem to have these "rights" too. A senior official at one agency told me that he had $300,000 in salary—10 percent of his office budget—tied up in nonproductive employees he can't fire. To get fired from a government job, says Derek Rodgers, "you have to be a drunk and refuse treatment or curse at your supervisor or hit somebody. Short of that, you can get away with about anything."

Scandalous, but true. While serving as the head of the civil rights office of HHS, Betty Lou Dotson took 126 trips to 38 U.S. cities and nine foreign countries at a cost to taxpayers of nearly $94,000. In the face of a congressional investigation, HHS removed Dotson from her job, but did not fire her. Instead, she was appointed to the Bicentennial Commission on the Constitution long enough for her to become eligible for her pension.

Daniel Stein got the same kind of ridiculous protection. Although he was convicted of attempted extortion almost two years ago, he's still employed at the State Department. As a convicted felon, he can't vote, but somehow he can pull down a GS-14's salary and, someday, a GS-14's pension too.

The way things stand now, to fire somebody from the civil service you have to compile a well-documented three-year record of the person's unsatisfactory performance. Most supervisors aren't likely to put in that kind of time. What they do instead the first chance they get is transfer nonperformers—just inflict them on another part of the government. (Sometimes the transfer even gives the headless nail a chance to drive in a little deeper: the first thing one malingerer did upon being transferred was to file a grievance against his new supervisor, so he could claim any subsequent adverse evaluation was merely retaliation.) The same logic that keeps no-loads and criminals employed also leads to promoting the undeserving, thus striking another blow for the slot syndrome and grade creep.

Business has begun to show that there is a way out of all this. Rosabeth Moss Kanter notes that a key step in Kodak's recovery was tying financial rewards more closely to individual performance and getting rid of unproductive managers while making it easier to bring in new, more promising ones from outside the company. She also points out that General Foods is having success with a "pay-for-skill" program, in which bonuses are earned by workers for each new job they learn. Government should aggressively open up its offices this way and get away from the three-year firing process and a hiring process that can sometimes last six to nine months. You can have promotion and retention rules that protect employee rights without punishing the organization for having common sense about job performance. Doing so will require government offices to identify their real goals, a good thing in any case.

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As for the elderly, the alternative to age-based mandatory retirement—which is unfair to capable older employees—is not lifetime tenure. It's merit-based continuance. There is a place in government for an 80-year-old man who can do the job. There is no place in government for a 30-year-old man who cannot.

Meeting and Memo Mania. When I ask a GAO auditor what he did during the previous workweek, here's what he tells me: "I went to three briefs on Capitol Hill, I attended three meetings with the Army materiel command. I got four briefs at the Army budget office. I went to a couple of internal staff meetings. And I played golf once." Actually, I don't begrudge the guy the round of golf; after a dozen meetings in five days, my head would explode. Part of the problem is that make-work *feels* just like real work.

But the question is, "How many of those get-togethers were really necessary?" It's the same with memos. You can get as bad a headache from reading 400 memos as you can from reading 400 pages of an important report. What's more, you can spend a huge amount of time crafting those memos—picking just the right phrasing or addressee list so that your boss replies to it, or endorses and forwards it, or just files it, depending on what you want to happen. And living on in the files as they do, memos are the perfect proof that you are busy. But how many of those memos are important for what the office is really supposed to accomplish and how many are, for example, explanations of when to use sex-specific job titles in official correspondence, notices of an upcoming review of all the different types of envelopes in the office, or evidence that a shaving waiver is being processed separately (all actual examples)?

"Memos are a very important thing," remarks Bob Michaels, who put in nine years as a foreign service officer, "in terms of covering your ass. You want to have the proof that so-and-so agreed or that you sought so-and-so's advice, so that if something goes wrong, you're covered."

But memos (and meetings) aren't just for coalition-building. They are also mechanisms by which the government worker can convince himself that he's not wasting his life and our taxes. "You start doing memos for everything," says Michaels. "It becomes a way of life. Memos for who you're going to have lunch with. Memos for where you're going to be at 3 o'clock in the afternoon." Perhaps the ulti-

Civil Servants Who Serve

Despite the federal workplace's general ineffectiveness, there are still good bureaucrats who know how to make their work count. Here are just two examples that readers have brought to the *Monthly*'s attention:

➤Terry Kincaid works for the Department of Interior's Bureau of Land Management in Idaho. He often works overtime without pay before, during, and after busy holiday weekends to clean up recreation sites. During a period of scarce funding, he has recruited a volunteer force including job trainees, Boy Scouts, juvenile offenders, and adult inmates; together they've built a boat dock, a picnic facility, and numerous new campsites. Without Kincaid's creative use of unpaid help, not only would none of these additions have been made, but in his supervisor's opinion, some of the recreation sites in the area would have been forced to close.

➤As an employee of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), Paul Curtis implemented a checklist system to ascertain whether the nation's Community Mental Health Centers were providing the patient services required by law in return for the federal funding they receive. With virtually no administrative help or secretarial support, Curtis discovered that many programs were flagrantly noncompliant and that therefore they owed the government money. After NIMH decided not to give Curtis legal support to recover this money, he took it upon himself to secure the help of attorneys at the Public Health Service. With their assistance, Curtis was able to recover $3.8 million.

So pervasive are the problems of the government workplace that it's nearly impossible to hear uplifting stories like these without also thinking of the downside. While Kincaid is pressed to the limit in the field, in Washington the Department of the Interior is thick with excess administrators. And since Curtis retired in 1986, NIMH hasn't recovered a single additional dollar.

—*S.S.*

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mate example of memos for everything is what the State Department calls a "memcon," a "memorandum of conversation." For almost any conversation with a non-American, says Michaels, "you were supposed to put down what you said, how that person replied, etc. A lot of people get into the habit of doing them because they enhance the apparent importance of their contacts. They make it look like you're out doing your job.

"You want to get your name on as many pieces of paper as possible," says Michaels. "It's like running for office. There's a vast incentive to turn out repetitious documents, replications of reports that were done six months or a year earlier. It's the 'heft test.' Repeatedly, my colleagues and I were criticized for not turning out enough material. Even though the general consensus was that it was never read."

"My office did nothing but churn out policies very slowly, which no one heeded," recalls Elizabeth Carlson, formerly at EPA. "I was in charge of working on a memo outlining how the Clean Air Act should be implemented on certain federal lands. The people living on the land submitted a plan, and this came to us out of the regional office." After going several years without getting a definitive response from headquarters, someone in the regional office wrote a legal opinion. "She probably spent a year or two on that. Then somebody else at headquarters got the project. She probably spent a year revising the memo. Then it was given to me to revise." Why did this take so long? "Nobody cared. . . . Nothing was propelling it—what moves the agency mostly is litigation and congressional pressure." Eventually Carlson got the memo through all the hoops in Washington—all but one. "On the last day of one general counsel's tenure, we brought the memo for him to sign. And he said, 'I'm going to leave this to my successor even though everything looks fine.'" By the time the new man signed the memo, it had been sitting in *his* in-box for another year and a half.

Carlson says that much of her job was reviewing things, like letters going out in response to congressmen's inquiries. "You review the draft that somebody in the program office has written, and that has to go up your chain of command too, and everybody has to circulate it. There's an office that's specifically responsible for circulating congressional inquiries. A lot of the responses were just EPA being evasive. Depending on the complexity of the answer—uh, evasion—responding would take anywhere from a month to four or five months.

"Everything took on a bureaucratic tone. We would have lunches and letters and memos about how people were going to choose offices. This went on for years. We were still working on a formula for who had priority—it was a very convoluted formula based on years of government service, and how long you had been at the agency, and what grade you were—when I left."

One major hidden cost of all these memos and meetings is that even the ambitious and talented (especially the ambitious and talented) have to read them and go to them. An office director at EPA tells me, "I'm probably a bad example because I actually have an exciting job," and that his condition for staying has been that "most of my personal time has been addressed towards current real issues." But when he begins accounting for his time, it becomes clear that there are lots of obstacles between him and real issues. "A typical day would include meetings with people at other government agencies, on a large committee that plans cooperative research strategies so that we can address issues together without balkanizing it, . . . internal staff meetings with our own staff here, and then a staff meeting twice a week with my boss and my peers."

In addition, "If you are ambitious and you want to get promoted," he explains, "you have to devote a lot of time to internal agency committees and task forces and personnel review boards and all sorts of other things like that, that allow you to become more broadly known around the agency." As examples of these "developmental assignments," he mentions a committee on the Earth Day celebrations, and task forces on personnel or compensation changes, on reorganization, and on improved budgeting. "You name it, and it's out there."

Here's the reverse logic of bad bureaucracy in all its glory. Too many people doing the same thing requires extra committees to coordinate their activities and extra assignments designed not to produce real output, but only to provide a chance to break out of a too-large employee pool.

Do these task forces ever accomplish anything? "People go off for hours at a time and for weeks at a time," says the EPA man, "and some document gets written, and whether or not it actually gets implemented, I don't know." However, there is at least one measurable consequence of all these meetings and committees. "The time for actually studying things and reading is just abysmally short."

"I would think that at certain periods we spent as much as half our time in meetings," a recently retired Marine lieutenant colonel says of his two tours of duty at the Pentagon. "With 20 or 30 people sitting around a table, going over a document line by line: "Is everybody happy with 'cat'? Oh, you want 'feline'? Well, let's think about that."

"We had 58 offices that we had to report to that controlled our program," says a retired Air Force

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colonel who managed an aircraft project. "Let's say we decide to change the canopy on the aircraft. Probably we'd have 20 meetings on it and several hundred drawing packages and, oh, within 18 months there would be some kind of decision about whether to do it or not. . . . In the meantime, of course, you're still building the planes the way they were. If the reason you changed the canopy was that it was bad, you're building at least 18 months worth of planes with the old canopy that you will someday have to replace. And it was all paperwork, because you and me and an engineer could sort all this out in a week."

According to Paul Quentin, a civilian who has worked for the Pentagon since 1966 both full-time and as a consultant, "The amount of time spent on actual technical thought on what makes weapons good, as opposed to having meetings, writing memos, and writing propaganda for more money, is only about one-tenth." So why all the memos and meetings? "To increase the budget."

Janet Kostas, a GS-13, tells what happens to a letter when it comes into the Department of Commerce, where she works. "It tends to get held up right there at the secretary's level, but when it comes down through the undersecretary to our group we're only given three days to write [a response] and it usually gets done and then frequently it will sit for three or four weeks." Why the delay? "Once it gets back up to the undersecretary's office, it has to go around for clearance, it has to go around to all the assistant secretaries. It gets cleared by the division director, the office director, the deputy assistant secretary, the assistant secretary, laterally to three more assistant secretaries, then the undersecretary. About nine clearances before it gets to the secretary's level. And there's the general counsel, and congressional affairs."

Clearance delay is very hard to contain because some messages are important and no deputy assistant secretary is going to let the other 25 deputy assistant secretaries get a leg up on *those*. That's why no one I asked could remember any bureaucrat ever requesting to be dropped from a clearance list. Still, the key is not to get a lot of deputy assistant secretary's assistant's deputies off the list. It's to get them off the payroll.

Meetings and memos are a vital clue in the search for ways to make government leaner. If there are people in government office A who aren't busy all day, should we fire them all? No—because most of them do *something* worthwhile. If there are needs that are not currently being met by government office B, should we automatically hire new people in response? No—that way lies the slot syndrome. A better idea is to find the people in office A who can go

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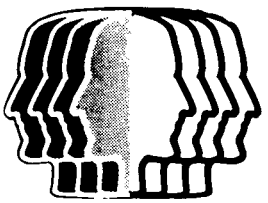

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over to help in office B. And one excellent way to find them is to determine who in A and B spend a lot of time at the same meetings, trading memos with each other, and talking together on the phone regularly. Once these people are identified, two wonderful things can happen: 1) Offices A and B can spend less time communicating about X and more time *doing* something about it; 2) The time saved by thus solving the problem with X can be applied in a similarly effective fashion to doing something about Y.

A GS-13 tells what happens to a letter when it comes into her office at the Department of Commerce: "It gets cleared by the division director, the office director, the deputy assistant secretary, the assistant secretary, laterally to three more assistant secretaries, then the undersecretary. And there's the general counsel, and congressional affairs."

While there are undoubtedly personnel cuts to be made in most government offices—and the workers I talked to tended to estimate the number of useless personnel in their offices at between 25 and 50 percent—too much talk about bureaucratic reform emphasizes body counts: Department X announces (or is urged to announce) a hiring freeze to hold its staff to n employees; Department Y announces (or is urged to announce) that it will be laying off n employees. But going by body counts is just as much a fallacy in this war as it was in Vietnam. The issue is not how many bodies are served up, but what they did and what the ones still out there are doing. You don't achieve 1) and 2) above just by eliminating people—you do it by *consolidating functions*. In effect, most communications channels are like friction points in an engine. Paying attention to the wasted energy they throw off helps you improve the design.

Of course, the key to pulling off this kind of redesign of government is flexibility—especially since it must be achieved without switching the engine off. The experiences of the bureaucrats I talked to confirmed the need for government to avail itself of two of the most effective tools corporations have been using to become more competitive: decentralizing and contracting out. These measures are crucial for consolidating functions. Cutting down on checkpoints puts more responsibility in the hands of on-the-line managers, and temps make much more sense than tempos.

Although the government employs some part-time and temporary workers, federal regulations discourage the practice. The *Federal Personnel Manual* states that no agency can abolish a full-time position in order to create a part-time one, and that no person employed full-time can be required to accept part-time employment instead. This sounds fair for jobs where the work is really there all the time—but there are a lot of government jobs where that is not true. Why should taxpayers support the difference in *those* jobs? Good candidates for a changeover to career part-time (workers in these jobs would have some health and pension benefits) are park rangers, whose work is seasonal, and air traffic controllers, whose workloads vary drastically during the day. Part-time positions can be especially good for workers. They provide income for many, such as students and parents of young children, who would otherwise have none. And part-time workers are by design task-oriented; you don't bring them in to go to pointless meetings.

Sleep and Creep Creep. Perhaps the most pernicious feature of the slot syndrome, grade creep, headless nails, and meeting and memo mania is that they are silent killers of the spirit. Under these influences, good people become indifferent and indifferent people become bad. Government becomes worse.

"I get paid too much for what I do, which is checking off things and following procedures," confesses Sid Finn. "I've gotten so lethargic." "I have preached to my children," says a GSA employee, "that I would never want to see them make a career in government."

"You don't take on too many things that might put you in a grey area," confesses FBI agent Cartwright, who was once investigated by the U.S. attorney for the procedural violation he committed by giving $5 to a prisoner so he could make a long distance call to his dying mother. "So after a while, what you see is a lot of guys who are totally mediocre who gravitate to the top."

Bob Michaels, the former foreign service officer, points out that the competition for FSO slots is incredibly stiff—last year only 205 out of 13,903 applicants were accepted. As a result, many junior foreign

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service officers are quite skilled and eager to do great things. "And then," he explains, "they find they are not doing great things. . . . And yet they fought so hard to get in that they don't feel they can quit. After 10 years of this stuff, the work ethic gets sapped away. . . . You know you're probably not going to make ambassador, so then it's how are you going to get through the day as easy as possible? . . . People start looking through the want ads for real estate deals, start calling their stockbroker five or six times a day . . . some guys have televisions in their offices."

Janet Kostas paints a similar picture: "There are people that I work with today who are every bit as competent and intelligent and hard-working as the people I worked with at [she names a large corporation], but the average person isn't. I can't think of anybody at [that company] who was sitting around not busy. Here they periodically write a briefing paper for the undersecretary if someone is coming in to meet him"—a two- or three-page outline giving the background on a problem a visitor is coming to talk about. "If you're knowledgeable in your field, it shouldn't take more than several hours," explains Kostas. "But they feel overworked if they get one a week because they're not used to it anymore.

"You can't see why it would benefit you to work harder for the rest of the day. . . . Most people won't take the extra initiative. Most people will just grab the extra time and do their checkbook or write a letter. Ten years ago, I would have gone looking for something to do with the extra two hours at the end of the day." It's especially significant to hear this from a woman who will tell you in an instant why she came into government—"It was Kennedy: 'Ask not what your country can do for you. . . .' Now, I would take that time to get something else done for myself, or just unwind a bit."

Besides the moral uplift that would come from doing away with the slot syndrome and all that goes with it through personnel cuts, job consolidation, and the aggressive use of part-time employees, there would be a great economic benefit as well. Last year, civilian government salaries totaled $85 billion. And under typical life expectancies, all those GS-14s and O-5s out there will eventually draw around $1 million apiece in total pension income. In addition, the government sets requirements for the office space and equipment and travel per diem and geographical pay adjustments, etc., proportionally due these service grades—requirements that are just as ironclad as salaries and pensions. That's why, for instance, the amount of office space per civilian government employee has gone up 66 percent since 1965. So, undertaking the above reforms could save billions.

Despite these spiritual and material advantages, the cause of government personnel reform has remained completely stalled. Why? Well, first, there's the Washington "it's too hard" syndrome—a tendency that is aggravated by a long history of no change and by the growing complacency of even the good people inside the system. Second, there's the active resistance of all those not-so-good people inside the system. The formidable job protections in the civil service were adopted to shield against the possible excesses of the spoils system, but they have also encouraged many government employees to think they have "rights" to a job that take precedence over the public interest. One of the biggest obstacles to streamlining government is this wrongheaded belief that the civil service is not a tool for doing what needs to be done, but a jobs program.

The politicians who could bring about the needed changes are only too aware that the headless nails can still draw blood. An interesting local example of this came recently in the D.C. mayor's primary race. One candidate kicked off his campaign by pledging to reduce what he criticized as a bloated local government, but retreated after receiving numerous complaints from city workers, saying he was "not going to get into this numbers game." Of the five announced Democratic candidates in the race, only one has flatly proposed a substantial job cut. She is lagging behind the rest of the candidates, who appear less concerned with overstaffing than with the potential endorsements of the 15 unions representing city workers. This is just a microcosm of the problem facing congressmen and senators, who worry about how hard it would be to run against the various federal employees' unions. There is a solution, though: political courage. If even just a few key elected officials would show some, the federal government could be made to work again.

Up against D. Wall

It's a shame that "bureaucrat" has a negative connotation (my dictionary *defines* a bureaucrat as "a government official who follows a narrow rigid formal routine . . . ") because government will never improve without good ones. But almost all the bureaucrats I spoke with were frustrated by their office's tendency to drift away from real problems into make-believe. Paul Quentin summed up the problem when he told me that the workaday world of the GS-15s and 0-6s at the Pentagon isn't about winning in combat: "It's about managing technology, it's managing systems, it's managing personnel, it's managing computers," he explains. "You use the words 'victory' and 'defeat' in the Pentagon, and people look at you a little funny."

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For the people Quentin is talking about—people who change the subject from what they ought to think about to what's easier to think about and who in the process lose sight of their real purpose—'bureaucrat' is way too good a word. You want the strongest possible expletive for that kind of person.

If you think that an interest in government bureaucracy is slightly quaint, just remember that Danny Wall is that kind of person. Michael Binstein reported in *Regardie's* magazine that when Wall took over the job of overseeing the rapidly deteriorating S&Ls, "he decided that the bank board's headquarters needed a face-lift. So instead of putting out financial fires, he did housekeeping. He replaced and rearranged furniture. He ordered a new desk phone because the color of his didn't match the shoulder rest. He loved to redraw organizational charts. . . . One of Wall's first requests was to call for a thorough inspection of the building. With engineers in tow, he noted the changes he wanted made. 'I proceeded with the building supervision people just to try to get things going in sprucing up things so that it was a more businesslike environment,' [Wall] explains. 'There were letters missing from the sign downstairs. Nobody paid any attention to that.'" And Wall recently told Joseph Nocera of *Esquire* that "I never lost any sleep. I knew I had done my best."

Danny Wall is a very expensive variant of the make-believing bureaucrat. But there's lots more where he came from. Let's get them before they get us, and leave government in the hands of those who know what it means to have done their best. □

The Worst City Government

Stickers have sprouted on street signs and walls all over Washington in recent weeks, brightly announcing, "Barry's Back." D.C. Mayor Marion Barry Jr., arrested January 18 on drug charges, has returned to the helm after nearly two months of rehabbing in the South. Still, the mayor's long absence made no visible mark on city services. These days, it's not the mayor but the courts that run the District.

As Barry returned from treatment in March, U.S. District Judge John Pratt levied a stiff contempt-of-court fine on the city for its "continuing obdurate resistance" to caring adequately for more than 200 mentally retarded wards. Pratt sided with the U.S. Justice Department, which charged that residents of Forest Haven, D.C.'s central facility for the mentally retarded, are compelled to live in "filth and squalor," without adequate nursing care, therapy, or even clothing. Caring for the severely retarded patients are only two staff doctors, one of whom was judged professionally incompetent by the local medical board in 1988 and is currently on a three-year disciplinary probation. In the past year, eight young Forest Haven residents have died of unknown causes. Conditions are so bad, said one Justice Department attorney, that "people are literally dying because of a lack of medical care."

The bleak conditions at Forest Haven are hardly new: District officials have been under court order to close the facility for 11 years. But today, 232 people with no real alternatives still call Forest Haven home. (Characteristically, Mayor Barry blames the decade-plus delay on the victims. They're so retarded, he contends, that nobody wants them as neighbors.)

The Forest Haven case is indisputably grim, but grimmer still is its familiarity. Judge Pratt's recent finding marks the seventh time in the past three years that the District has been held in contempt for providing grossly substandard care to its most dependent clients. The previous contempt findings attacked shoddy or nonexistent medical care for prisoners, overcrowded juvenile detention facilities, correctional staff shortages, and inhumane shelters for the homeless. In an eighth contempt proceeding—regarding the city's failure to perform background checks on nurses' aides for the retarded and the elderly—the District was recently granted an additional 60 days to comply with its duties.

How does the District's record compare with that of other cities? Over the same three years, Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, and Detroit have not once been cited for contempt of court. Even New York City earned only one citation—which was quickly revoked without a fine.

One usually understated judge, handing down her contempt order on D.C.'s homeless services, called the city's largest shelters "virtual hellholes." Another slammed D.C.'s "relentless recalcitrance" in failing to remedy its overcrowded prisons. A third judge didn't bother with showing indignation. Rather, he cannily theorized that the District considered the contempt fines a sort of licensing fee—a necessary cost of continuing to do business as usual.

The expense, incidentally, is nothing to sneeze at. Recent fines alone have cost the District more than $2 million and counting.

—*Katherine Boo*

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The Phillips Curve

Is there an emerging populist majority?

by Paul Glastris

Kevin Phillips earned his reputation as an acute political prognosticator for his 1968 book *The Emerging Republican Majority,* in which he coined the term "the Sun Belt." Hindsight has not been as kind to some of his later predictions. In *Post-Conservative America*, published in 1982, he argued, among other things, that the third-party candidacy of John Anderson was a momentous event that could redefine American politics. Phillips's latest book* is intriguing, well researched and forcefully argued. But his fallibility is something to keep in mind, especially if you are a liberal, because his thesis is precisely what liberals want to hear: that the Democrats will profit from a rising populist backlash against the rich-get-richer policies of the Reagan-Bush administrations. The liberal left has, of course, been making this case for years. But Phillips's conservative credentials add a kind of reverse neocon respectability.

The first half of his thesis—that the rich made out fabulously in the 1980s while the bottom half of America got a smaller piece of the pie—is familiar and indisputably true. Phillips pokes fun at media commentators who describe as "rich" those with $50,000 or $100,000 annual incomes. Such people are mere foot soldiers in a march directed by awesomely rich generals in the upper half of the 1 percent bracket, who measure their extraordinary gains not in income but in assets and net worth. The number of decamillionaires, centimillionaires, and billionaires in the U.S. nearly tripled from 1980 to 1988. Only rarely in American history—the Gilded Age of the 1880s and the Roaring 1920s—have the rich gained like this. Such eras, argues Phillips, inevitably spark political counter movements: William Jennings Bryan's Prairie Populism and FDR's New Deal.

Phillips doesn't believe that the growing chasm between the super-haves and nearly everyone else can be fully explained by market forces. Too much evidence points to self-interested manipulation of the rules of the game by those at the top. A *Business Week* survey found that in 1979, the average CEO

**The Politics of Rich and Poor: Wealth and the American Electorate in the Reagan Aftermath.* Kevin Phillips. *Random House, $19.95.*

Paul Glastris is a contributing editor of The Washington Monthly.

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made 29 times as much as the average manufacturing worker. By 1988, the average CEO was making 93 times as much.

Washington was the biggest manipulator. It's not exactly news that Reagan's tax policy favored the well-to-do. But Phillips relentlessly argues that nearly every Republican creation of the past decade did the same. The deficits kept real interest rates high, a boon to the coupon-clipping creditor class as well as to Wall Street traders and investment bankers. And deficits fattened the wallets of wealthy owners of T-bills, both here and abroad, while punishing middle-class taxpayers who shell out most of the $200-plus billion annual interest payments on those debts. Meanwhile, deregulation showered its benefits on the affluent, who disproportionately ride planes and make long-distance calls. The poor and lower-middle class, who take buses and make local calls, got nothing but higher bills and service cutbacks.

Cappie-bashing

Politicians, the media, and the public are beginning to grasp the significance of these trends, Phillips argues. TV shows that glorify wealth, like "Dallas," are losing ratings, while 82 percent of respondents to a Gallup poll last February favored raising taxes on those with annual incomes above $80,000. Phillips writes like someone who not only expects a populist backlash, but is trying to egg one on. He labels the financial policies and practices of the Reagan era "Economic Darwinism" and offers arch descriptions of the haunts of the super-rich, such as Greenwich, Connecticut, "where the view of Long Island Sound from Round Hill Road is almost worth an SEC violation."

If Americans are so ready to be outraged about the Lifestyles of the Rich, why is silver-spoon George Bush the most popular of presidents? Phillips's explanation is that liberals simply let it happen, as they did during past "capitalist heydays." What the Democrats have always needed is a great economic crisis that convinces Americans that laissez-faire policies and growing disparities of wealth hurt the nation as a whole. Rather than sit around praying for a recession, Phillips suggests the Democrats exploit public outrage over 1980s-style capitalists like Michael Milken and hands-off Republican politicians who are letting the Japanese buy up American assets.

Phillips is not alone in thinking that the Democrats can thrive simply by cranking up the populist rhetoric. Liberals all over America want Michael Dukakis's head on a pike for his failure to indulge in class warfare until the very end of his campaign, when polls showed that the tactic seemed

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to work. Phillips even quotes Republican campaign consultants as being secretly relieved that Dukakis did not resort to populist appeals any earlier. Democratic Party regulars may think House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt is a drip, but they are more and more taken by his theme of economic nationalism.

Vox popped

What Phillips and others don't acknowledge, however, is that any Democrat who follows the populist game plan runs smack into the party's greatest weakness: Government. The populist alternative to laissez-faire Republicanism is more federal "programs," funded by progressive tax increases. Yet any time a liberal politician says the word "program" most voters hear "bureaucracy" and rightly get turned off. Another possibility is Daniel Patrick Moynihan's payroll tax cut proposal—the cleverest populist idea in years. So why did Democratic leaders in Congress reject the notion? Perhaps because they're too wedded to government entitlement programs that the tax cuts might jeopardize.

Phillips suggests that affirmative government may be making a "philosophical comeback." Well, maybe, philosophically, among some voters. But that's a long way from saying that the public actually trusts Democrats to *run* the government. In a sense, Michael Dukakis was right: The issue *is* competence. Democrats simply haven't demonstrated much of it recently. Why hasn't the savings and loan debacle sent citizens rushing into the arms of the Democrats for government protection against ruthless capitalists? Because Democrats and the government itself are as deeply implicated in the scandal as the crooked S & L managers.

Phillips also argues that liberals need a powerful intellectual vision capable of competing against the "seamless web" of conservative ideas knitted in the past 15 years by thinkers such as George Gilder and Arthur Laffer. Three liberal proponents of economic populism, Robert Kuttner, Paul Starr, and Robert Reich, seem to agree. They have just published the first issue of a new quarterly called *American Prospect*, in hopes of helping renew the liberal ideology. But publication was delayed because copies of the new magazine got stuck at a postal facility in Richmond, Va. "We wondered why nobody was getting them," Starr told the *Chicago Tribune*. If Starr, Reich, Kuttner, and now Phillips want to help liberalism, they should turn their celebrated minds to the task of reforming government bureaucracies. Populism can be fun, but it will be neither profitable nor morally defensible unless the Democrats can learn how to deliver the mail. □

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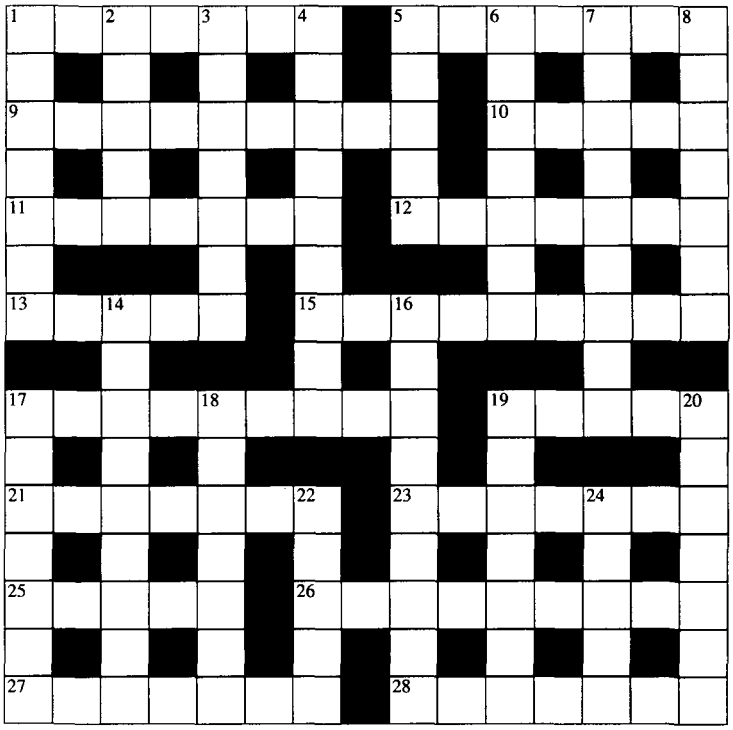
POLITICAL PUZZLE

by John Barclay

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g. (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g. USA, are treated as one word.



ACROSS

1. Captive hogs ate in peculiar way. (7)
5. Popular objective from around Scotch river flowing West. (7)
9. Fractional part of leaderless census taker. (9)
10. Twelve ounces in hiding place. (5)
11. One Cheops arrangement for shelter. (7)
12. Mix arts artlessly for discredited ideologue. (7)
13. Demonstrated against fabric? (3,2)
15. Chopped finer tree for block. (9)
17. Mixing palette in silver ends mineral deposit. (9)
19. Popular food sold in Tampa stadium. (5)
21. Aquatic mammal and insect join for waterproofing. (7)
23. Language disturbed his naps. (7)
25. Picture a period after 999. (5)
26. First person, then Cambridge institution, swallowed by crazy viper in early stages. (9)
27. Son's arm mangled for extorted fees. (7)
28. Devour one egg scrambled around middle of April. (7)

DOWN

1. Bosses swallowed in python chosen by lot. (7)
2. Totals including parenthetical start for the pits. (5)
3. Summon careless railroad again. (7)
4. Ideologue planned street mix. (9)
5. Make a turn in marketplace. (5)
6. One hanging in there made nude err. (7)
7. Loss of control shakes insides around jazz finale. (9)
8. Sea creature devoured in pride of lion's. (8)
14. Recount all eating in assembly. (4,5)
16. Confused turtles in subway control device. (9)
17. Less courteous raises distributed around September first. (7)
18. Station Jackson for inactive medical control device? (7)
19. Cleverly ply gain in the theater. (7)
20. Disturb the late Jim Thorpe, for example. (7)
22. Sorts copies? (5)
24. It is less friendly to throw rice after one. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:

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POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

Public affairs books scheduled to be published this month.

Washington Rollercoaster. Sondra Gotlieb. *Doubleday-Canada, $24.95.* Fasten your seat belts folks. Sondra Gotlieb, "wife of" the former Canadian ambassador has struck again—*Washington Rollercoaster* is more than just a bumpy ride.

It is part "Perils of Pauline," part innocent abroad, part long-suffering spouse, with a large dollop of revisionist history thrown in.

Although Sondra considers herself a humorist, somewhere along the line she has lost her wit. She adheres to the credo "get mad and get even"—and does so with the venom of a cobra.

Let's get right to the heart of the matter. Nancy Reagan made her do it.

In case you were on Mars, I had better explain.

On March 19, 1986 the ambassador and his wife were entertaining the "A" list of Powertown at an official dinner for Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. Standing on the steps of "the Residence," waiting impatiently for Vice President and Mrs. Bush to arrive, Sondra got miffed at a last-minute cancellation. A self-styled expert on the complicated nuances of seating, she "just couldn't bear the thought of fussing with those tables at such a late moment."

Unable to control her emotions over such an egregious situation, she expressed her dismay by hauling off and slugging her social secretary, Connie Connors, who was standing dutifully by her side. All the other heavy hitters, so to speak, and important newsies missed the scene. They were busy partying inside. Sondra thought she was home free. But one lone reporter, Juliet O'Neill, of the Canadian Press, "not a guest," as Sondra points out—as if she had been trespassing—was nevertheless alert in the driveway. To Sondra's chagrin, O'Neill witnessed what Sondra calls "a private incident," and ever so impolitely broke the story.

Hours later, the unsuspecting ambassadorial couple were celebrating what they considered a successful evening when they were engulfed in what Sondra describes as "a tidal wave of poisonous abuse and denigration from the media."

Trying further to prove her innocence, Sondra goes on to question both O'Neill's reporting skills and her eyesight, but enough of that. The whole slap flap can be laid right at Nancy Reagan's door.

The night before the slugging, the Gotliebs were late for a White House state dinner, and Sondra says the first lady was rude. Sondra says she was so distressed by Nancy's slight that she failed to sleep that night. The next day she decided to diet in order to squeeze into a tight new red dress. By eight in the evening she was starving, exhausted, and still unnerved by Mrs. Reagan's behavior.

"My nature turns nasty at the end of the day when I try a starvation diet—especially if I haven't slept well the night before," she writes.

So, when Connie Connors announced that the seating of the dinner had to be rearranged, it was too much to bear. (Not only is Sondra obsessed with perfect placement, she also credits herself with a unique talent: the smarts to know which super sparklie to seat where. "A number of people benefited politically, socially, and some I think financially because they sat next to the right person at our embassy. I knew how to make a table happy.")

Whack, Connors's earring went skittering down the driveway. At this point, according to later reports in the Canadian press, the ambassador launched a clever preemptive strike. He offered to resign on the spot. The prime minister, unwilling to play the heavy, turned him down.

Sondra was sage enough to realize that her golden days were numbered. *Vanity Fair*'s "twinkling hostess" had committed a serious *faux pas*.

Instead of facing up to her own actions, and reality, she found somebody else to blame. The media.

Not stars of the Powerful Press like Katharine Graham, Barbara Walters, or David Brinkley, who were deemed sufficiently famous and influential to be part of her crowd, and who came to her aid, but rather "the swarm of freelancers, hatchet girls, hacks, desperadoes, and paparazzi who would sell their underpants to Lyndon LaRouche in order to get a piece or picture published in anything from *People* magazine to the *Post*."

These types—since there is no mention of jockey shorts, it seems safe to assume that she is singling out women—along with a "couple of nasty ambassadors' wives who perhaps had been previously envious of my profile in Washington and some members of the social press who had never met me or barely knew me but who used to call to be asked to our embassy as a guest"—are all held personally responsible for her downfall. The slightest criticism during her seven years in Washington is attributed to a jealous journalist or an "embassy rat," i.e., a diplomatic groupie, who was not on her "A," "B," or "C" list and therefore coveted an invite to one of her inimitable *soirees*.

Even such Powerful Jobs as Sally Quinn and Ben Bradlee have been stung by her poison pen. But because they are in the highest echelon of what she calls "the upper media," she does not trash them. (They were also regulars at her salon, but more important, both have the ability to strike back.)

What Sondra slyly suggests is that the dynamic duo were responsible for the demise of her literary career at *The Washington Post*. Sondra became famous, or infamous, for her "Dear Beverly" columns, a series of satiric letters in which she gave good gossip to a friend back home.

"I was told—*sotto voce*—that Ben Bradlee and his wife Sally Quinn were unhappy about me writing for the *Post*. They couldn't do much about it in the short run because the op-ed section was ruled by Meg Greenfield. As my good fortune increased, so did my enemies."

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When "Dear Beverly" disappeared shortly after the punch-out, Sondra puzzles, "I wondered if somehow Ben Bradlee and Sally Quinn's opinion had finally prevailed."

Despite all her harried hostessing and exposure to "quality" folks, i.e., important jobs, Sondra finds few kind words for most denizens of the federal city.

Although she is now comfortably ensconced in a new million-dollar home in Toronto, while "husband of" practices law, publishes a magazine, and serves on various boards, Sondra professes to miss Washington. One wonders why.

She never ceases to grumble about running the embassy and labels herself "the unpaid manager of a small hotel."

Dealing with such taxing problems as swimming pools, servants, party tents, house guests, and dusty diplomats brought on continual panic attacks. Weekends with the Annenbergs in California, Katharine Graham in Martha's Vineyard, not to mention the beautiful people in Palm Beach and the Hamptons, were unadulterated hell. She never knew what to say, what to wear, or whom to tip. Living well was not revenge. It became a chore and a bore. One long, petulant whine.

So why the nostalgia for Powertown? The sudden yearning for the star-studded years? Our gal Sondra is always quick to make a point: "Potomac fever is a highly communicable disease, especially among those who have tasted power."

Enough said.

—*Sandra McElwaine*

Preferential Policies: An International Perspective. Thomas Sowell. *Morrow, $17.95.* "Passionate commitment to 'social justice,'" writes Sowell, "can never be a substitute for knowing what you are talking about." For well over a decade, he has been challenging with icy logic the rhetoric of activists for preferential policies—known in this country as "affirmative action." In 1980, in an article in the *Wayne Law Review,* he demolished the basis on which activists claimed that racial discrimination accounted for minority groups not being represented in the professions and high-level positions in proportion to their numbers in the population. Pointing out, for example, that the average age of Mexican-Americans is 18, Sowell asked whether one can logically expect an ethnic group, half of whose population consists of infants, children, and teenagers, to be represented in high-level adult jobs in the same proportion as ethnic groups with an average age of 46 (Jews), 40 (Poles), or 37 (Irish).

Now the Hoover Institution economist has expanded his inquiry to preferential policies—those specifying that not all individuals be judged by the case criteria—in the many parts of the world where they are in force. Preferential policies—whether designed for the disadvantaged or advantaged—specify that not all individuals be judged by the same criteria.

In Sri Lanka in 1948, the Tamil minority, while only 20 percent of the population, accounted for 32 percent of the government's doctors, 40 percent of its engineers, and 46 percent of its accountants. With independence in 1948, the proportion of Tamil professionals grew even larger. The situation was ripe for a demagogue: In 1956, a stirring political upset by a prime ministerial candidate running on a program of preferential policies favoring the Sinhalese majority led other politicians to vie with each other to jump on the bandwagon. A variety of ever more restrictive measures against the Tamils was put in place, including a cutback in the number of Tamils permitted to go on to higher education, particularly in science and the professions. With opportunity closed off to the younger Tamil generation, violence broke out. By 1985, India had 40,000 Tamil refugees, and in 1987 India landed 50,000 troops in Sri Lanka to take over the maintenance of order from the Sri Lankan army. Within one generation, the politicization of race and ethnicity had brought groups who had lived in amity to the point of implacable hatred and civil war.

Ironically, in a reverse situation, the Indian government, following initiatives begun under the Raj, maintains well-motivated preferential programs to help the miserably oppressed untouchable castes improve their lots; the results, according to Sowell, have

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been disappointing and have come at the cost of lower standards in education and other areas.

But the United States remains the laboratory where Sowell most closely examines the gap between the goals of affirmative action and the results. Conceived to compensate blacks for the retardation of opportunity they suffered from enslavement and Jim Crow laws, affirmative action programs quickly expanded to include groups with no such history: Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, women, the elderly. In whatever field any of these groups were "underrepresented," the presumption was discrimination, and the accused employer or institution had the burden of disproving the presumption. But Sowell takes the minority-group activists to task for ignoring the size of the available pool from which to fill those slots. Granting that SAT scores are hardly the sole or even the most important criteria for college admissions, the following observations of Sowell's are nonetheless interesting: While dozens of U.S. universities have entering classes with average combined SAT scores of 1,200 or above, in 1983 fewer than 600 blacks in the entire nation had scores of 1,200 or higher. This meant that to achieve "statistical representation" (11 percent of the U.S. population is black) the eight Ivy League schools alone would need more than the available pool of blacks—making it impossible for the dozens of other top-tier universities to approach their minority quotas. Without, that is, lowering their standards—which is what, under various euphemistic guises, they have done.

A dramatic example of the disservice affirmative action may do to the groups it is designed to help can be seen at Berkeley, where the entering class closely reflects the population pattern. But more than 70 percent of black students fail to graduate. In 1987, of 312 blacks entering, all were admitted under affirmative action programs rather than by meeting the standard academic requirements. The average SAT score at Berkeley is 1181. The median score for blacks was 952, *which is above the national average for all groups*. The tragic irony, Sowell notes, is that the blacks who failed to graduate from Berkeley were perfectly capable of graduating from the average American college; by being mismatched with Berkeley they were derailed by a perverted notion of do-goodism.

Wherever preferential policies exist, Sowell believes they share these characteristics:

Although designated as temporary, they tend to become permanent and to widen their scope . . . within the designated groups, benefits have gone disproportionately to the already more fortunate . . . they have increased polarization, with the non preferred group reacting with political backlash, mob actions, or other forms of violence . . . official, academic, and journalistic writings have been notable for the dearth of data on the results of such programs.

The outlook, according to Sowell, is not much rosier. Preferential policies will continue to spread because, however ineffective, they are popular with politicians—a quick fix at a low down payment with the real financial and social costs to come later.

To many of today's liberals, Thomas Sowell will come off as cold, hard-eyed, and unsympathetic. (He believes, for example, that improvement in education will start in the public schools when we learn to treat class-

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—Leonard Reed

Pundits, Poets, and Wits: An Omnibus of American Newspaper Columns. Karl E. Meyer. *Oxford University Press, $24.95.* Fifteen years ago Marquis Childs suggested that columnist James Reston of *The New York Times* wielded the power of three U.S. senators. Childs, who wrote a column himself, was woefully bad in his arithmetic—unless, that is, he actually had three specific mediocre solons in mind. Newspaper punditry was overrated in 1975 when Childs was writing. And claims for its power are certainly exaggerated today, when the newspaper column threatens to become little more than the opening act for the hustling exhibitionists' more lucrative performances—the book, the lecture circuits, the TV panel show, the motion picture, the video cassette.

There was a time, however, when the *Times*'s Reston and his crosstown rival, Walter Lippmann of *The New York Herald Tribune*, really did count. As Karl Meyer makes clear in this indispensable collection of newspaper columns, the art form has had a glorious past. There were, in fact, several golden ages, each skillfully mined by Meyer. The first included Ben Franklin, James Alexander, Tom Paine, James Madison, and the other authors of the Federalist Papers, who helped "invent the United States," in Meyer's incisive phrase. Their work is well known, except perhaps to graduates of American colleges. Less familiar to professional students of newspaper history is the body of marvelous work done in boisterous Chicago at the turn of the century. Meyer's omnibus rescues some of the newspaper contributions of Eugene Field, George Ade, and Don Marquis, among other midwestern columnists whose work appears here along with the somewhat better known output of Peter Finley Dunne and Ring Lardner.

As late as the 1960s, newspaper columnists still mattered in the political and literary life of America. CBS television used to do an annual interview with Walter Lippmann. Meyer's selections from Lippmann columns show why the columnist was more than a supreme presence, "the name that opened every door," as a colleague once put it. Writing after the Bay of Pigs debacle, at a time when Khrushchev seemed to be riding high, Lippmann drew a counterintuitive moral: There was, he wrote, no reason for the United States to emulate the Soviet Union by conducting "large secret conspiracies." The only real alternative to communism, said Lippmann, "is a liberal and progressive society"—a judgment triumphantly borne out three decades later in Eastern Europe, and indeed, in the Soviet Union.

The best of the columnists in this collection writing today tend to think small rather than in the grand Lippmannian manner: Art Buchwald, Russell Baker, and Molly Ivins working in a deadpan comic style; Jimmy Breslin and Murray Kempton hanging out around the police precinct and criminal-courts building; Ellen Goodman in casual conversation at the dinner table. Perhaps the world is less understandable today than it was in Lippmann's and Reston's day; or more to the point, the world has always been complex and columnists have grown to recognize the limits of the form, and their own limits.

Meyer is too evenhanded to argue that the old days were better. He sees much to admire in the current work, and his contemporary examples bestow as much pleasure as the earlier ones. But Meyer does more or less give the last word to the essayist E.B. White. Writing about Don Marquis, White observed: "In 1916 to hold a job on a daily paper a columnist was expected to be something of a scholar and poet, or if not a poet, at least to harbor the soul of a transmigrated poet. Nowadays to get a columning job, a man need only have the soul of a Peep Tom or a third-rate prophet. There are plenty of loud clowns and bad poets at work on papers today."

White wrote that in 1950 . . . long before McLaughlin and Company.

—Edwin Diamond

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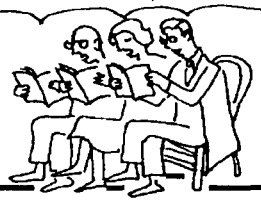

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